

MUM'S GIRL WAS NO LADY

by the same author



LOG OF NO LADY

NO LADY IN BED

NO LADY WITH A PEN

NO LADY MEETS NO GENTLEMAN

NO LADY IN THE CART

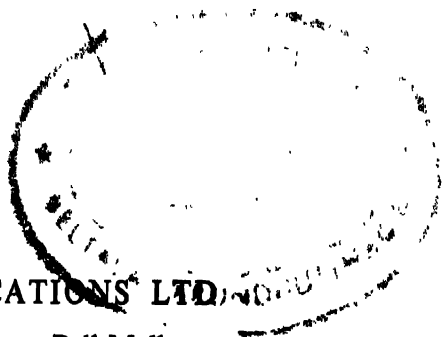
MUM'S GIRL WAS NO LADY

by
~~URSULA~~
BLOOM

CONVOY PUBLICATIONS LTD

6 & 7 Crown Passage, Pall Mall

London



***First published in 1911
by Convoy Publications Limited
6 & 7 Crown Passage, Pall Mall,
London, S.W.1***

***Printed in Great Britain
by W. Taylor & Co. (Printers) Ltd.
Hackney, London, E.9.***

CHAPTER ONE

THIS IS NOT REALLY MUCH TO DO WITH NO LADY. NO LADY herself puts in her appearance weighing just on six pounds on the last page. This is really the story of No Lady's Mum! Before No Lady even knew her. It begins five minutes before No Lady's Mum was born, on St. Patrick's Day in the late afternoon at Swaffham, in Norfolk.

Grandmamma had been 'taken bad' several hours previously. The house was in a whirl. The three other children, two boys and a little girl of fourteen months only, were in the nursery kept well away. The gamp was with Grandmamma. Grandmamma thought that a doctor was unnecessary, and she and the gamp were having a party on their own. Grandmamma did not know what sort she wanted, having two of one, and one of another.

'It's a little lovely,' said the gamp at last. 'It's a girl!'

* * *

Perhaps before I introduce you to my mother, at that time just a little lovely, I will introduce you to my grandmother, four foot nothing of rather snobbish busyness, who controlled her house at Swaffham in faithful imitation of that other little martinet, Mrs. Victoria Guelph at the far end of the Mall.

Grandmamma had made a good marriage. She had contacted a Mr. John Gardner—she always called him Mr. Gardner, even when they were alone together—and he was well off, with handsome whiskers and a smoking cap. Mr. John Gardner ran a chemist's shop in Swaffham, and was known as a *parti*, in an era when *parti's* were the thing. Grandmamma disliked the shop; she had always hoped for

a professional husband, and the chemist's business was gall and wormwood to the little woman. She found it mortifying to be on the wrong side of a counter, but consoled herself with buying a carriage and pair which uplifted her to the ranks of 'carriage-folk', which was comforting.

The Gardners lived in a large red brick house in the market square of Swaffham, with the shop occupying the entire ground floor (for the rooms behind were store rooms) and a large spreading spaciousness above.

Grandmamma though in the twenties wore a cap. It would have been quite revolutionary to have eschewed this. She kept four servants—less would have been demeaning, and might even have given some people the idea that more could not be afforded, which would have been humiliating. Grandmamma would have thought it *infra dig.* not to have had an annual baby, and had worked hard at her marriage.

Birth was discussed by visiting ladies, but the amorous attentions of 'gentlemen' were considered rude and never referred to. Nobody ever alluded (even in fun) to the large bed with the cerise draperies and pompous tassels that occupied the major space in Grandmamma's room. Although everybody presumed that Grandmamma and Grandpapa slept there together (single beds had not been invented, the devil did that for marriage later on), nobody had ever even seen them together in the room at the same time. It would have been considered most suggestive if they had.

Grandmamma's day started at seven-thirty. Before anybody ate a thing, the servants were trooped into the dining-room, to stand erect before a separate chair whilst Grandpapa read from the family Bible in which his marriage and everybody's births and deaths were inscribed in fading ink. Lengthy prayers were done with, and then breakfast began. Steak for Grandpapa (if required, and it usually was required), the stamina of a 'gentleman' necessitating full red meat. Egg and bacon in the plural for Grandmamma, tea

from a pregnant-looking Britannia metal teapot. Coffee was considered continental, therefore taboo.

After breakfast Grandmamma's cap was changed for a more housewifely article, a plaid apron surrounded her, and she bustled off to contend with her arduous duties. What she did, I can't imagine, but for the next couple of hours she kept up the pretence of being extremely busy. She whirled maids round their jobs, she chose the pudding for dinner (at twelve), she jangled keys and gave orders most of which she promptly contradicted and then became annoyed that people got bewildered. For two hours she made a busy little nuisance of herself in a big way!

She did not work. The mistress of the house could do nothing menial; she might have filled a few sugar basins, or put out the store (kept bolted and barred from thieving fingers) of fresh linen. Her scope was limited by her position as mistress.

She did not shop; nobody did. Tradesmen called respectfully for orders and parleyed with cook, who conveyed their enquiries to Grandmamma. When the day was fully aired, she would lace up a ridiculous little pair of boots, put on her dolman and her street bonnet, then go out armed with a sunshade against fine weather (sun being extremely dangerous) or a plaid umbrella if inclement. After half an hour she would return utterly exhausted, to dispose her weary body on the dining-room sofa, and partake of a glass of port and a macaroon! Here she remained in a blissful state of headiness until dinner was served.

Grandpapa came in crowned by a suitable skull cap (there seemed to be a great deal of cap changing in this era) and the pair then settled down to hot roast beef and pudding. Everything was served well on heavy damask with a pot fern in the centre of the table. A side table would be similarly draped, but with no fern, where a maid stood at the ready 'to wait'. On the side table was a silver basket (which always went to bed with Grandpapa in case of unfortunate

accidents), the knife box, and a tin for soiled cutlery. They ate liberally, swilling it down with porter, for porter was the thing. It made blood. It would have been cissy not to take it.

Naturally after dinner Grandmamma was once more worn out, and would again tuck herself up for a blissful afternoon on the sofa snoozing, so that she could reserve her energies for later in the day.

Tea arrived at five o'clock with meat sandwiches for Grandpapa who might need extra stamina, cake, watercress, radishes, and shell fish if in season. However, Grandmamma drew the line at winkles, because they were vulgar and she and vulgarity were as the poles apart. She had mapped herself out a ladylike routine, and to it she stuck with gallantry.

But, like all people with a prudish outlook, she was habitually letting herself in for scenes that were embarrassing to a modest woman. There was that unfortunate time when having partaken abundantly of fig pudding, she had made a bolt for it. 'It' was a prominent feature of the house, being a small bedroom converted to this use as was the trend of fashion. It had blue china fitments and a mahogany surround, with something like a stirrup pump at the side. Very modern, but rather dangerous. It was unfortunate that Grandmamma rushing thither *in extremis* did not notice the window cleaner the other side of the window, until too late.

She tatted during the evening, and supper came in late, tea being substantial enough to allow people to exist for some hours. Supper meant hot gin or toddy, cold meat, parkin, a sort of glorified tea with spirits, spread out upon the table. After which prayers were said again, the servants coming in to share (but nicely segregated by the sideboard whilst the family occupied the hearth), then everybody adjourned to bed. It was an exhausting life.

Newspapers were only read by gentlemen, politics

provided purely a male interest. Grandmamma did not read very much.

It must be allowed that it took her some time getting in and out of bed because there were very fixed theories about what was decent to be worn, and what was not. She wore a vest, squirmed into under cover of the tent-like envelopment of a nightdress in case anybody saw her. This was topped by a chemise, made of white cambric with a little simple feather-stitching; there was no point in getting Grandpapa too excited. Her coultie stays with their forceful whalebone laced her in tightly, with busks in front rammed well up into the bust no matter what damage they did. She had never heard of a bras. The object of every corset was to narrow the waist remorselessly, shoot the bust as high as possible, and then perch shortly on the hip line. Grandmamma was a very small woman, and she had few difficulties with her waist but had she done would have overcome them in the most masterful manner, I am convinced.

She wore a couple of bodices, a pair of white calico drawers which were a couple of bolster cases slung on a band and buttoned by one most perilous button at the back. Her all depended on that button. With less than four petticoats she would have felt nude, three were plain, the fourth one was very fancy indeed. On Sundays she wore entirely different linen all through, just to prove that it WAS Sunday, though to whom she proved it history does not relate.

I fear I should never have seen eye to eye with my Grandmamma.

* * *

At the end of her first year of marriage, Grandmamma—as always—did the right thing and presented her husband with a boy baby to be named after his papa. Little fuss was made. A gamp presided, and Grandmamma lay in for four days or so, after which she arose looking pale, and I should imagine feeling rather ill. She ‘ate for two’ all through her

pregnancy and all through the period when she fed the baby. Being pregnant was slightly disgusting. One disappeared from human view, and was hardly to be seen; one made devastating excuses, 'the vapours', 'a little biliousness', etc., but the truth could never be admitted because that was 'not quite nice.'

The following year Charles, the second son, was born. They had wanted a girl; it was the proper thing to have a pigeon pair, and annoying for a woman like Grandmamma to be caught doing the wrong thing. I should think it was poor fun having babies in that era in the big cold old house in Swaffham. A doctor was not engaged, that would have been both immodest and cowardly. Drunken old gamps killed more than they delivered. It was considered immensely dangerous to wash if ill in bed, so nobody washed! Nobody had heard of an anaesthetic, for all this was before the days when the dear Queen's last child was born, and Victoria was so criticized for having chloroform, afterwards referred to as *à la Reine*.

It had been written in the Scriptures that a woman must go through it when having a child, and through it they went.

The first daughter was not born for three years, there being one or two slight contretemps with Grandmamma having hysterics and inducing miscarriages. Then a little pet called Fanny Elizabeth was born, known in the home as Missy, and Grandmamma adored her. Fourteen months after, we arrive at the moment when the gamp said once again 'It's a girl', and Grandmamma sank back exhausted. This was to remain the baby!

Grandmamma discovered that the trouble with gentlemen is that they will be gentlemen, and even his activities in the chemist's shop did not seem to have taught poor Grandpapa much of family limitation. No more of this, said Grandmamma to herself, and she decided that even if the model at Buckingham Palace had nine, that was a competition she did not choose to enter into.

The baby was christened at Swaffham church, the whole family attending, even Missy aged fourteen months.

'I shall call her Emily Mabel,' said Grandmamma; 'nobody could quibble at those names.'

'I shall call her Mary,' said Grandpapa.

Grandmamma looked at him and she blinked. Too late she discovered that Mary had been a first love of his, a devastating girl who had worn white tarlatan and gay little button boots at her first dance. She found that out through a girl friend later on, and had a good row on the strength of it. But little Polly Gardner had been christened, and that was the end of the argument.

* * *

Of my mother's early days I know the little that there was to know, and it was pathetically routine-ridden. Barbara the nurse wheeled out the little girls in a tall wickerwork pram of bassinet shape, perched on four stilts at the end of which were ridiculous little iron wheels making an unearthly noise as they rotated. The elder children walked. The little boys wore full stuff petticoats until they were five years old (that was the mode), and no male child could be promoted into trousers until he was quite a large boy.

Their early education was presided over by Eleanor Magee, an amiable middle-aged woman of about twenty-five! She was obviously an old maid (twenty-five was definitely *passée*); she taught juvenile lessons, did light dusting and duties, also the flowers. Not that many flowers were 'done', because they were considered to be unhealthy in the rooms and liable to start a fever. A plain fern in a pot frilled with red crinkly paper was infinitely preferable. Just as none of the windows could be opened, but were permanently sealed with gummed paper and little sandbags, in case somebody caught something. It was well known that tuberculosis could be contracted this way.

Grandpapa was a busy man, working hard in the shop,

and doing the books in the evening, whilst Grandmamma snored on the sofa, to get herself into fighting trim for a good night's sleep. Of his private activities I know little, save that he smoked wearing a correct cap for it, and played cricket with a profuse beard and a high hat. He possibly played for what was ultimately to be 'The Swaffham early closers', which must have mortified Grandmamma in the extreme.

In those days there was no early closing. People never shut up the shop save on Sunday when it would have been mortal sin to open it. On Sunday everything was different; the little town passed into a coma.

Then the greatest gloom overtook the household, because this signified a strong religious tone. The best china was used, and an ancient aunt's silver teapot replaced the pregnant piece of Britannia metal.

They rose later to longer and more dreary prayers. Immediately after breakfast they changed into their church clothes (why they had not originally dressed into these I have never known, but that would have been wrong). No beds might be turned on the Lord's Day, no hot food could be eaten. No noise was permitted and work was not supposed to be done. No books of any interest whatsoever were allowed to be read. Last thing on the Saturday night any dubious literature was wafted into hiding, suitable Sunday reading being produced to take its place. This consisted of The Book, of course, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, the latter being a full-fruit standard, furnished with nightmare illustrations.

On Sunday people crept about the house on tiptoe; windows were partially shrouded as though for death, and everyone had to adopt a glum expression.

At half-past ten the solemn procession started for the church, joined en route by similar family processions all aimed at the same destination. Church was the thing; chapel was rather common. R.C. definitely taboo, for that was popery!

Grandpapa and Grandmamma walked first carrying pompous-looking books and spy-glasses with which to follow same. Two sons hand in hand walked behind their parents, and they wore round straw hats with fancy streamers flowing from them, little velvet jackets and trousers, and small smart kid boots. The two little girls followed wearing Sunday clothing from shift to ulster. Miss Eleanor Magee next (she being on the touch-line, certainly not family yet not servant), then two by two the maids, led by cook. They did not sit in the same pew; that would never have done, in case somebody mistook the family for one of the domestic staff. I should have thought this would have been difficult, because the staff wore prim black bonnets of a humiliating order, and dreary frocks. Grandmamma had the right to adjudicate what they should and should not wear, for she was the female counterpart of God in their lives.

The family went up the aisle well in advance of the servants, as presumably they would precede them to Heaven. Everybody sat in the rightful order of seniority. There was no laughing in church, in fact there was nothing to laugh at, for everything was very formal.

The service ended about a couple of hours later, for the incumbent often preached for three-quarters of an hour, in fact the congregation had the sense of having been done out of something if they didn't get their money's worth. They went home to dinner, cold and rather cheerless. They droned through the dreary afternoon till full high tea, and the little girls went later to bed, but the little boys were trotted along to a dose of evensong, to ensure that they grew up good.

Every moment of their days seemed to have been docketed and scheduled. Nobody ever did anything differently, but always followed a pattern. The children lived in the large sprawling nursery, Missy in a genteel aura ('Always such a little lady', glowed Grandmamma). Missy loved being ill,

and basked in the hope that one day she would catch consumption which was then the fashionable complaint to have.

Polly was a very small child like her mamma; she had a long face and very dark blue eyes. Her nose was too long, her mouth too wide; she had her father's 'dark mouse' colouring, and most unfortunately the Reynolds features. (Grandmamma had been Miss Fanny Reynolds.) She had also inherited her mother's nose which was inclined to flush, I always suspected from her leanings towards the comforting hot brandy or gin that she liked.

Now do not get me wrong! Never for a moment would I infer that my Grandmamma drank, because she did not. She merely gained strength as did every other exhausted housewife of that same period, and believed herself in need of it. Just as she expected her two little girls when mere infants to partake of port and macaroons, 'to make blood'. Not the macaroons, of course! They were just blotting paper!

Although the menus of those days were much more restricted, and housewives dwelt on plenty rather than on variety, drink flowed, and even the children partook. My uncles John and Charlie tipped bravely at ten years old. It was considered the right thing and made men of them.

Little Polly Gardner was a comfortable little girl.

She developed early in her life those sporting tendencies that stayed with her always. She adored games. She practised long jumps with her brothers. When Jem Mace came to give them their boxing lessons the little girl learnt too, and old Mace declared she was the best man of the three of them. She was always her father's favourite and adored him. She never cared much for her mamma.

The family were fairly affluent, but they lived in a frugal but comfortable way. They had a carriage, the boys had ponies; a large fat donkey fitted with panniers in which the two little girls sat was led about Swaffham by Barbara.

Occasionally they even took holidays, which was a very go-ahead thing to do. Great Yarmouth and Hunstanton were the places to visit and there one bathed from a machine, nuffed up in voluminous clothing, and terrified that any gentleman should be beastly enough to bring field glasses on to the beach! What these peeping Toms hoped to see I have yet to discover, because it is certain that not one inch of feminine loveliness was ever exposed on these occasions. Grandmamma herself had bobbed at the end of a rope from a bathing machine, towed out a few yards and in itself sufficient barrage against prying eyes.

The children hated bathing, because of the 'ducking woman', a terrible creature frequenting every beach in the country at that time, in black poke bonnet, who waded about up to her waist in the water, prepared to duck everybody as they entered. It was very dangerous to bathe unless you got your head completely wet and immediately, for this could cause inflammation of the brain!

It cost you sixpence to be ducked and gave the children nightmares for weeks after.

The first big event in little Polly's life came one summer when the family were staying at Sporle. At Sporle was a comfortable house that Grandmamma took for a few months for the children. She knew how to do things well, I must say, and never stinted where they were concerned. Grandpapa would have been about thirty-five at the time, and it was here that he had an accident whilst playing cricket. He didn't duck in time and unfortunately his high hat did not save him, so that he sustained concussion. He did not get over this as well as he should have done, though vigorously bled for it, and going through all the Victorian treatments guaranteed to kill most people. Then one summer's afternoon at Sporle he played hide and seek with the children. He was seeking, and went searching up into the

loft, through an open trap door. The boys, hearing him coming and getting thrilled, let down the trap door and knocked him completely out. When he recovered consciousness he was partially paralysed.

Everything was done to help but there was no help, and busybody little Grandmamma was not the type of woman to suffer such a disaster cheerfully. She did everything she could and finally employed a male nurse to wait on him, and Miss Magee to superintend him. Eleanor Magee proved herself to be a most able nurse, but because she now had to forsake the little girls, another governess was engaged. Miss Winterbourne wore a plaid crinoline—now considered to be a trifle old-fashioned—and a centre parting well plastered down with rancid pomade, which smelt dreadfully in the hot weather. Miss Winterbourne was a nice woman and because she knew nothing of life was the ideal custodian for the two little girls.

Their early upbringing was strict. The major recreation appears to have been a little light knitting for the 'poor French' in the Franco-Prussian War (so much to be deplored!). Life was hedged in by dire penalties. It was the era of spare the rod and spoil the child, and a good weekly whipping was doled out with the weekly dose of castor oil and Gregory powder, considered to be so advisable.

Little Polly went to a few parties, in ruby velvet with a ruthless plaid sash. There was lots of 'cup' for the children, but few sweets which were considered to give them spots, and of course ices were certain death and never permitted.

Her brothers liked her. Her sister didn't. These two boys used to take the little girl out with them in the carriage, getting outside the town to unhitch the horses and then drive them across country tandem fashion, at a good solid gallop, with little Polly clinging to the seat and enjoying every moment of it. Another favourite trick was to hang the 'baby' by her heels down the soft water well to gather the ferns for them, that grew so lushly up the sides, ultimately

to take them into the house as a choice gift for Mamma who was partial to a nice piece of fern. This they did for years and how the child wasn't dropped into the soft water well nobody knew. Ultimately when discovered, it was censored, not because it was dangerous, but because being hung upside down showed her nether garments which was most vulgar!

She skated well even as a very small child, but then all the fen folk do skate well and have every scope for it.

'Polly's unladylike,' said Grandmamma, 'very different from her dear little sister. Now she IS a good child!'

But the house was noisy with four children, and poor Grandpapa, a log in the cerise and mahogany bedroom, tired easily. School was on the horizon.

CHAPTER TWO

GRANDMAMMA HAD TWENTIETH-CENTURY IDEAS OF education. The boys were at a boarding-school in Richmond, and the little girls having passed through Miss Winterbourne's inadequate ministrations, were dismissed to Mrs. Trundle's estimable day school.

Unfortunately Grandmamma was one of those women who adore change and was never too well satisfied with what she got. She pried too closely into matters, and in consequence invariably found out something that she didn't like about schools! Polly was just six when she started attending Mrs. Trundle's emporium for the daughters of gentlemen.

Naturally she was not to know why Mrs. Trundle appeared so often with her cap awry, and found difficulty in pronouncing even the simplest words. The bigger girls knew that Mrs. Trundle had been at the bottle again (there was always a curious chinking from her petticoat pockets when she moved, which could hardly be attributed to the chatelaine), but Polly being a simple child, merely stared owlshly.

There was the unfortunate day when Grandmamma flounced into the school having heard rumours and being naturally indignant; she arrived at the moment when Mrs. Trundle was least capable of coherent argument, proving Grandmamma's worst suspicions. Little Polly remembered being grabbed out of the class, and hauled out of the room by Grandmamma sweeping voluminous skirts and with a little girl by each hand, whilst Mrs. Trundle, presiding over the class, sat tittering helplessly, her cap getting more and more awry.

The next school was Miss Hunt's. Miss Hunt was a very different calibre, she meant her girls to learn something, and in parrot-fashion! Lessons were taught on hours that trade unions would have screeched about in dismay. Polly liked them, Missy sat and howled; she only wanted to be genteelly ill. But of course that didn't last either, for nothing ever did with my Grandmamma who doted on a nice bit of variety.

At the end of a couple of terms Grandmamma appeared at the gate again enquiring why the homework was always French. Miss Hunt knew that Grandmamma did not understand French and, being a cat, called up the French mistress to confront her. There was a row. Grandmamma loathed being caught out, and off she went again, a little girl by either hand, bonnet tipped well forward, and face very red.

The next school was not so particular as to the little girls being gentlemen's daughters or not. Mrs. Graham was a large abundant lady like the Duchess of Teck to look at. The little girls were now becoming accustomed to spending a couple of terms getting used to the new school and then being hustled out in a row. This school lasted for four terms, which was surprising, and then Grandmamma arrived at the inevitable restless stage, so that she had to go poking her nose in to see how the children were getting on. She acted as usual unexpectedly. There was a strange man in the hall, too rough and ready to be the father of a prospective pupil yet too familiar to be a servant. Believing that something was being kept from her, Grandmamma had to pursue the point until she found out who he was, only to find to her horror that he was one of those shocking creatures known as 'bum bailiffs'.

Into the class she stalked as usual seizing one little girl by one hand and one by the other, and out she swept again. Now to be trotted off to Mrs. Tranter's, the only school left open to them.

'When Mamma's finished with Swaffham, there's always

Lynn left to her, and after that it'll be Norwich', said the eldest boy Johnny, who was a clever lad and saw through his mother.

Mrs. Tranter was a sweet old lady, from whom they learnt exactly nothing but were very happy in her custody. They would have left as usual one afternoon in the inevitable row, save that suddenly events were crowding in upon the dull life of the chemist's shop in Swaffham. Life was moving fast.

* * *

Even the children knew that their father was growing worse. Returning from school Polly always sat with him for half an hour; she read to him. But as the years went on, she was not always sure that he knew her. Sometimes she would tease him. 'You don't know who I am?' she would say.

He used to smile wistfully; he would say, 'Oh, yes, I do, you're Emma!' It was a name she had always hated and whilst he could do this to tease her she knew that he recognized her.

But of course the time came when he did not even call her Emma. She would go away wistfully. Death is alien to a little girl of eight. She wondered why these things happened. She got little consolation from Missy, who didn't interest herself much, but she did get consolation from Eleanor Magee, who would come into the room and gather little Polly into her arms.

Then came the first big tragedy. Charlie, her favourite brother, died of diphtheria. Grandmamma had insisted on fetching him home from Richmond 'to be properly nursed', against the doctor's wishes, and he had died of a hæmorrhage within the week.

The little girls wore voluminous black, the blinds were drawn and mutes stood at the door. The Sunday shutters went up. Nobody spoke save in whispers. The awfulness of death was dwelt upon and intensified so that the child

suffered some shock from it. Johnny armed his Mamma to the funeral and wore a 'weeper' to his high hat, and took two dozen one-inch black-bordered handkerchiefs back to school with him, which were the envy of any genteel family.

It was of course distinguished to have a death in the house, even though quite common people had them too, and it put the family in a slightly interesting position. When the little girls returned to Mrs. Tranter's after a suitable lapse 'for respect', Missy put on side. The new black alpaca pinafores were so genteel. She was rather enjoying it. Besides, Charlie had never been looked upon as being her brother, she and Johnny were supposed to pair off; Charlie was Polly's pal.

Into the house came a new figure.

Grandpapa was growing less able, a manager for the business was necessary, and Grandmamma did not trust the pimply young man who had helped Grandpapa in his more fortunate years, and who, though undoubtedly doing his best, was hardly a hundred per cent efficient.

She advertised for a suitable manager, and weeding out the unsuitable replies finally interviewed the runners-up. She decided in favour of Mr. Arthur Mavor Brown. This simple and unambitious name stirred within Grandmamma a romantic hunger. Mr. Brown was tall and over slender; he had ginger whiskers and bad taste in clothes, wearing a lot of looped watch chain, a seal and fob, shepherd's plaid trousers, and carrying an elegant stick with a conspicuous crest on the knob. He had enchanting manners, eulogized Grandmamma, and everyone could see with a single glance what a real gentleman he was!

He was not the chatty sort, in truth his brain worked fairly slowly, so that he found it difficult to know what to say next. He drawled, which was in itself most aristocratic. At the very first interview he proved that he knew something of women, for he confided in Grandmamma that he was a cousin of Lord Mar and Kellie. This lit the aristocratic

flame in Grandmamma's yearning heart; she had always wanted to be somebody, somebody more than a chemist's wife, somebody great. She had always hated the patronage of people who were above her in position. The Martins of Narborough, the Blooms of Castleacre, and the Hudsons of Castleacre too, kind but, she felt, condescending. The rector of Swaffham was affable but his wife did not call. Old Dr. Love had his potions made up in the shop sometimes, yet never treated Grandmamma as an equal and let her realize it. It was the era of keeping your place and bitterly did she resent this. She knew what her place was and was itching to get out of it.

Grandmamma would never have done anything wrong. She was the epitome of virtue. If Queen Victoria never erred, then nor did Grandmamma, but it was not long before she realized that an alliance with the cousin of a Lord would be a very classy step in the right direction. Surely that would give her social kudos and set all Swaffham by the ears?

Delicious dreams began to circle in poor Grandmamma's fluttering little head. I admit that this personal claim to greatness did more to get Mr. Brown the job than his knowledge of the British Pharmacopœia, which was nil, as all Swaffham was to discover later on. Grandmamma now talked of nothing but Lord Mar and Kellie! She brandished him about the place; she was deeply concerned with coronets, and now set en route for the big adventure of her life.

The first time that Polly and Missy saw Mr. Brown he was installed in the shop and they did not like him. He was a glorious Adonis with his beautiful ginger whiskers peering from between the enormous bottles of cerise and crème-de-menthe coloured water, his gold fob jingling. There was also the ecstasy of the elegant stick with the Mar or Kellie (or both) crest being stuck in the Gardner hat-stand in the hall.

And Grandmamma was in a very good mood.

On the stairs Barbara and the maids chattered. Polly heard them. Miss Magee coming quietly out of John Gardner's room shook her head at them. She said, 'We have got to remember that life is not easy for Mrs. Gardner. She is shouldering a big burden with her children and the shop, and then losing her little boy. We must not criticize her but help her.'

* * *

Johnny of course smelt the inevitable rat. And he was not the sort to keep quiet about it. At fourteen Johnny knew how many peas made seven! 'Ma's after old Brown,' said Johnny joyfully to the scandalized audience.

'What do you mean?' asked Polly. It was in the garden at Sporle whither the children had been sent for the holidays whilst Grandmamma stayed in Swaffham with Grandpapa rapidly growing worse.

'If Papa dies we shall get old Brown as a new pa.'

'Oh no!' gasped Polly, absolutely flabbergasted, 'but that would be dreadful.'

'I shall run away to sea,' said Johnny.

Undoubtedly the children were of an age when they might—as the servants said—'notice things'. Grandmamma was finding all the family business a little cramping, when she now wished to become the virginal charmer. So next term the girls went off to boarding-school, which was the beginning of a new series of adventures. Missy was a nostalgic child (I wish I had never inherited it from her, but suppose I may profoundly thank my Maker that that was the only thing she passed on to me). She always started at a new school by crying herself sick and having to be sent home. Polly was an alert little girl who never complained. Besides she didn't particularly want to go home; her only real friends were her father who was now past recognizing her, Eleanor Magee and Barbara.

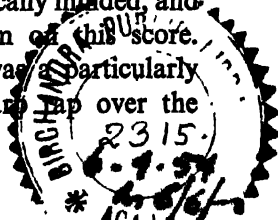
'And the dogs,' she once told me. 'I always loved the dogs very much.'

The schools of that era intended for young ladies were arduous. The pupils slept in unaired dormitories where hot-water bottles were unknown, and hot water would have been considered to entail pampering—of course taboo! Nobody washed very much, it was not expected of them. Baths were *non est*. A single china basin was supplied per ten girls, and a large ewer of cold water was given to them. There was of course no school uniform or list of clothes to which parents had to conform, and games were not encouraged. They did play dominoes, spillikins and tiddly-winks on the ambitious evenings, but anything more advanced would have been considered hoydenish. Jem Mace's early teaching faded slightly.

The unambitious food must have been extremely good for you but was unappetizing. If a girl did not like a certain pudding she was given more of it to cure her of fussiness. The tomato was not invented; only the very rich had ever seen the banana. Grapefruit was unknown, and any abundance of fruit was considered dangerous. Salads could only be eaten warily because they encouraged flatulence. In Norfolk, pudding preceded meat, and if not pudding it was Norfolk dumpling.

The lesson hours were long and arduous, but the little girls learnt almost exactly nothing. The use of the globes, French from the English angle, the three R's; music for the piano was most important towards social success. Practice was conducted in an unheated room in the middle of a Norfolk winter which was rigorous. Small hands went blue with the cold. But it fitted little girls to become young ladies, so the powers-that-be had it.

Of the three children probably Johnny was suffering the most from having no dear Papa to pull him up. Grand-mamma doted on him. He was very athletically minded, and was so good that schools cultivated him of this score. Johnny was in the champion class. He was particularly bright boy and had he had a good sharp tap over the



knuckles in the early teens might have been influenced the right way. As it was he was set for catastrophe and his dear Mamma encouraged him because she could never see any farther than her nose.

'He's my son,' she would say proudly, 'my firstborn and the dearest!'

She stuck by that.

* * *

It had always been a foregone conclusion that John Gardner must die. He became worse. Eleanor Magee wrote warning the little girls very carefully. Mr. Brown quoted the latest bulletin as he doled out the rhubarb pills and the slippery elm. There came the day when the shutters went up, and the mutes stood beside the door looking appropriately miserable. Each of the maids had ten shillings to buy mourning, and Miss Winterbourne a pound because she was 'a little better'.

A nice piece of expensive ground was purchased in the new churchyard, and Grandmamma banded her full black frocks with crepe prepared to do the thing in style.

At school Miss Robinson sent for the little girls. 'I am afraid I have bad news for you,' she said.

They guessed of course at once. Though for a moment it occurred to Polly that it might be Johnny, for she had never properly recovered from Charlie's sudden death.

'It is your poor Papa,' said Miss Robinson with downcast eyes, 'and your brother has come to fetch you home.'

They hardly recognized Johnny in his thick new black suit, with a weeper round his hat and his hands gloved in black kid. 'Well, girls!' said Johnny. He wasn't depressed. Poor John Gardner had been ill too long, and had really died to them all some years previously.

The little girls' luggage had been packed, and they were all bundled inside an enormous carriage that Johnny had hired, to take them home from Lynn. It was a very cold

Spring day. He sat there with a sister on either side, telling them that he was convinced Mamma would now marry old Brown, and that'd be a nice thing, wouldn't it? .

Polly was frightened of returning to the gloomy house which had terrified her at the time of Charlie's death, for it had seemed to be so unreal. The mutes, and the shutters, like the worst sort of Sunday!

Upstairs new mourning was being sewn for the daughters. Barbara and Eleanor Magee were working very hard. The whispering had returned; the whole place was hushed. No air could be admitted, nothing that seemed at all alive. Even the people living here had gone almost moribund.

Polly had the same feeling of fear that had come when Charlie had died. She hated it. Naturally it was a splendid funeral, with Mr. Brown supporting the widow who wept into a large black-bordered handkerchief, and afterwards Mr. Farr read the will before an assembly black as crows, with the blinds lifted by only two inches (measured by Miss Magee who appreciated the urgency of being exactly correct).

My Grandpapa had left a good deal of money, a thousand in trust to each of the little girls, a third of the shop to his son, the rest to Grandmamma. Mr. Brown stayed on to manage for her, and gradually he managed a good deal more than the chemistry business, his ginger Dundreary peering from behind huge bottles of vividly coloured water.

'What a beautiful man! What a splendid fellow!' cooed Grandmamma, much supported by the association dim though it may have been with the Earl of Mar and Kellie, who was a dreadful non-starter and never even wrote to his cousin.

Mr. Brown now took up his abode on the premises, because Grandmamma would have found it highly dangerous to live in a house wherein there was no gentleman to protect her against evil men. I don't know what she thought the evil men might do to her but the idea of robbers

caused her considerable agitation. After all, as she impressed on everybody, she DID sleep with the silver basket.

Of course it was a major mistake having dear Mr. Brown to sleep in the house, for Swaffham, never slow to chatter, now formed the opinion that the silver basket was not the only thing dear Grandmamma was sleeping with! And of course, she was the most scrupulous woman; she would never have done anything wrong at all. But at that period of history you could not have a 'gentleman' to sleep in the house, however unattractive you might be, or however gentlemanly the gentleman! The little girls, away at school, did not realize that the local scandal-mongers had got their claws into Grandmamma.

And what did she do? She tossed her bonnet, and said that it was jealousy. Never before had Swaffham seen such a perfect gentleman! They were envious of his high social position and she knew it. They could say what they liked!

Nowadays she could have done it; she couldn't then. I am sure that she contemplated marrying dear Mr. Brown the moment her two years' widowhood were up; she must have contemplated it a good while before poor Grandpapa died, for he had been a mere log for years, and she had been really hardly treated by fate.

A few of her friends, and the more daring of her relatives in the vicinity, suggested that she should dismiss dear Mr. Brown *pro tem.* into lodgings. Up she fired! She wouldn't turn him out. And why not? Because I suspect that in her heart she was afraid that somebody else would get this Adonis, even though he wasn't everybody's money. Few men looked so enchanting, few men dressed so beautifully, and had the added attraction of a noble earl (who never turned up, the cad!) bobbing about in their background to life.

Grandmamma underrated her own value but was not to know it. She was worth a tidy sum, and nobody appreciated this more fully than modest Mr. Brown. What he did not

know was that whatever else happened, he must keep Johnny's nimble fingers off it.

However, there was another fly in the ointment. Even Grandmamma found it difficult to be girlish with a son almost grown up, and the little girls fast arriving at the awkward age when they asked a lot of silly questions! She dealt with Johnny first; Johnny was a bib-full! I must say that mad and bad as he may have been, I have always had a secretly amused cleaving to him. He had left school and had been articled to an office in Swaffham, which was a bad mistake because he saw too much. He knew all the disreputable and very few of the respectable people. He was the great white hope in athletic activities, but at heart a thoroughly naughty boy.

Ultimately she shipped him off to a brewery in Baldock, where he did much the same thing as he had been doing all his life. He and Grandmamma were co-trustees for the little girls, and of course before very long Johnny was short of money. This is a trouble that nearly always assails young gentlemen of his habits. It was maddening to him to know that the money was sitting there, and he was unable to get at it. What on earth could a couple of nincompoop sisters want with a cool thousand each, to accumulate? he asked himself. The girls would be at the mercy of any fortune-hunter who came along, prophesied the wise Johnny, they'd have been far better without it.

However, his co-trustee being Grandmamma, ever rigorous in performing a duty, he was *pro tem.* rather stuck. Anyway he knew that she cherished the mid-Victorian faith that a gentleman could do no wrong, so Johnny thought—given time—he might be able to do something about her.

Meanwhile the little girls kept popping back from boarding-school on holidays. Every time that they returned Polly found Mr. Brown more and more established, and Eleanor Magee more and more concerned for it. Eleanor did

not like the way that things were developing, also Grand-mamma was increasingly touchy. The ritual of living insisted that she waited as a widow two years, or it would be rushing her fences; in the two years any other girl might get Mr. Brown. In fact I am almost sure that he had not declared himself. He was sitting there hoping to keep the job and bachelordom at one and the same time, and Grand-mamma intended nothing of the sort for him.

At holiday times the little girls were in the way. Missy was a peevish child, and cried herself ill about it. Polly was just stolidly unhappy.

'I must do something about my dear daughters,' said Grandmamma.

'Ah, the little girls!' cooed Mr. Brown, 'what are we going to do about the little girls?'

CHAPTER THREE

JUST ABOUT THIS TIME GRANDMAMMA FOUND THAT THE élite finished their daughters abroad. She learnt of a finishing school in Bonn-am-Rhein, where eight young ladies of fashion were accepted. Here they studied the arts, French and German and deportment. They were taken about and no holidays were catered for. Grandmamma felt that to be a considerable point in favour of the place: a girl went there 'until finished' the brochure tactlessly put it.

The Fräuleins Künde were expensive, and highly recommended; only the best girls went to *Wilhelmstrasse* for their education.

Grandmamma got it all properly fixed up, and one dreadfully dull day, Johnny, who wasn't so much of a man of the world himself, but thought he was, took the little girls to Bonn. They had never been out of Norfolk before. It was a dreadful crossing, which nearly killed Missy, so that Johnny had to carry her off the boat whilst Polly walked behind with the hand luggage. One can imagine Johnny's fury; a young man in the late teens confronted with the ordeal of carrying a fifteen-year-old sister down the gangway, whilst the fourteen-year-old one dragged behind. It was a definite loss of caste. He told his contemporaries that he was always getting saddled with 'those damned girls'.

Missy was making the most of it; she had a foolproof system which had worked with great success, and whenever she got to a new school she refused all food, and cried until she got to the stage that she couldn't stop. This always brought somebody racing from Swaffham to fetch the poor child home again. But what she had not reckoned on this time was, that although you can chase off to fetch a girl back

from Fakenham or Norwich, you cannot fetch her from the other side of Cologne. Grandmamma must have taken this into consideration when she weighed up the pros and cons for Bonn. It was a major pro.

The little trio broke the journey at Rotterdam. Johnny left Missy alone in the hotel where she cried her eyes out, and he took Polly out to see the sights. Polly wasn't such a bad child, for a girl.

'Now, come on, Baby,' said Johnny.

Any less desirable chaperone for little Polly Gardner than big brother Johnny has to be imagined. They went to the *Fiske Markt*, which intrigued her, seeing the women with their starched caps selling fish fresh from the Zuider Zee. They visited the *Laurenskirche*, not at all Johnny's idea, I am sure, and at the corner of the street he fell in with a somewhat doubtful Dutchman who took him off to a delectable spot where (after he had popped Polly home to bed) he had some most absorbing gambling, lots of Schnapps and a good time to be enjoyed by all. In fact Johnny left Rotterdam with the idea that it was a damned good show; Missy thought it too awful, Polly thought it was very pretty.

The following morning they went on to Cologne. The weather was brightening, but it was still very cold with the keen still coldness of Spring. Johnny booked himself a room at a likely-looking hotel, and after lunch drove the little girls out to Bonn. I can imagine them sitting in the carriage on either side of their brother, Missy already crying, and Polly becoming excitedly quiet.

The *Wilhelmstrasse* was wide and airy. The houses were after the pattern of the houses in Queen's Gate, handsome and expensive and rather pretentious. They had white façades, and ornate iron balconies round which a vine or a tuberose twisted romantically. Then Polly had no idea as to what good use those balconies could be put.

As they rang the doorbell they saw standing on the balcony a dark-eyed, flowing-haired, full-bosomed young

girl of about sixteen who looked appreciatively down at Johnny with the eyes of a Lorelei! She hung her head like some beautiful lily, but that was about all the lily there was attached to her!

'Gad,' thought Johnny who was easily impressed, 'what a little puss!'

The girls glanced at her. Polly smiled, the girl smiled back with a warm and friendly greeting. Later it transpired that she was Ethel Olixmannher, the illegitimate daughter of a minor Royal from the Balkans. The minor Royal had got in touch with the Fräuleins Künde, giving full instructions and paying for Ethel to be brought up as a lady. She was a clever girl showing quite young a particular bent for her mother's line of life, and she was very quick to do her swooning lily act always greatly appreciated by young gentlemen. The Fräuleins had had very little peace since Ethel Olixmannher had come to live in their midst though she supplied the most useful propaganda which they invariably brandished before the parents of prospective pupils. Parents always liked to think that the daughter of a Grand Duke was one of the community, and never found out until too late that she had been on the wrong side of the blanket.

The little trio was admitted into a capacious but bitterly cold hall. Now the girls were frightened. They were shown into the salon, equally cold, a bleak room scrupulously furnished, and looking very foreign to them after Swaffham. After a suitable pause Fräulein Künde appeared to greet them, hailing them with execrable though dictionaryally correct English. She was a large woman, her hair centrally parted, well pomaded and pulled over her brow like lace curtains divided on a suburban window. Her over-trimmed skirt was too plenteously frilled, and her placid hands were folded on a high stomach that even the strongest whalebone could not keep down. After a little while her married sister Frau Teitz came in, a smaller edition of Fräulein Künde,

with the same desperately correct English. It was all bewilderingly strange to the little girls. Then Herr Teitz arrived, clicked his heels and bowed stiffly from the waist so that they could see the whole of his shaven head like a bladder of lard. He tried to make himself amiable with clumsy playfulness. Herr Teitz had fought duels, and was as pock-marked as a two-year-old pin-cushion with the additional glory of a frightful slash that had almost severed his right ear, and of which he was immensely proud. He terrified the little girls. He taught music. Fräulein Künde, doing her best to be kind, told them of the three Misses Leigh, charming girls from Manchester, of Miss Katie Barnes, and with a little ostentatious display of Miss Ethel Olixmannhei, daughter of a Grand Duke. She made no mention of course of Ethel's mamma, and really Ethel's mamma was the pivot pin on which the whole of the school swung!

White wine and biscuits were produced on a red plush tray—their best—whilst everybody sat round feeling extremely embarrassed. Johnny had dropped his first brick by trying to sit on the sofa (very rude in Germany); he had to be shoo-ed off it! The sofa was reserved for the family or for Royalties—i.e., the Grand Duke, said Fräulein Künde.

I don't think that the Grand Duke had ever actually visited the school, in fact I am sure that he had not, but the Fräuleins went out of their way to convey that he came often and incognito, which gave an added air of mystery.

Missy began to cry again and was whisked off. Fräulein Künde then explained to Johnny and Polly that although at first life might seem difficult for the girls it was the short cut to speaking languages excellently. For three days a week only German was spoken.

'But I know no German,' said Polly, now really alarmed.

'You will soon know much,' the Fräulein assured her.

French was spoken for the other three days, and on a

Sunday for a treat you might speak your own language. This was of course a shock to the child. She could not imagine so strange a world, with even the language taken away from her.

She bade good-bye to her brother and went off to the room she was to share with Missy and Ethel Olixmannher. It was usually planned that sisters slept alone together, but Ethel presented a problem to the Fräuleins. She was one of those young women you could never be quite sure **WOULD** sleep alone, so they always put her in with company hoping thus to keep her skilfully chaperoned. It didn't work, but for the time being the Fräuleins did not know this.

It was a bleak little room with three stiff beds, and one painted chest of drawers to share between the three. On the top were three brush-and-comb bags, a tiny strip of mirror, and a tin wasin with a china ewer of cold water in it. Washing facilities were nil. Beyond the tall windows an iron balcony looked out upon a square of garden that later in the year would be lovely. The lindens were in bud.

Missy was lying crying on an extraordinary bed which had no blankets but was fitted up with a couple of mattresses which the occupant slept between, like the ham in a sandwich.

'I won't stay. I'll be ill. I'll be so ill they'll have to send me back to dear Swaffham,' howled poor little Missy.

Polly did not know what to do. She felt a little sick and sad herself. She had taken against Bonn-am-Rhein and the *Wilhelmstrasse*, and the thought of staying here for four or five years with never so much as a holiday was completely horrifying.

She went to the window to hide her tears. She looked down into the pleasant garden below. There was Johnny walking along smirking, with a fresh rose in the lapel of his coat, and Ethel hanging confidently on to his arm. He had about him the look of a young man who believes that he is

a conqueror, and not the conquered walking into a trap which has been baited with the stalest bit of cheese in all the world!

* * *

The first *mittagessen* was a horrible awakener. At Swaffham, the food though dull was profuse. Grandmamma had been a great exponent of roast beef and Norfolk dumpling; she liked lots of red meat and kept a generous table. But the *mittagessen* was weak *suppe*, black bread, with a few grapes. They were dismayed and Missy burst into fresh tears at the table. The sight of her sister upset Polly. Wine was served with all meals; no use bringing up young ladies to be squeamish. Meat was seldom served. Usually it was veal, but the beef was very tough.

'It's horse, you know,' explained Mary Leigh to Polly.

Breakfast was *non est*, and the girls had no classrooms but did their work in the drawing-room or in the garden. They had arrived in a cold spell, the heating was abysmal, because the Fräuleins kept insisting that it was the time of year when it oughtn't to be required and to light the furnaces now when to-morrow might be blazingly hot was a very bad mistake. They were parsimonious.

The French that had been taught the Misses Gardner in England set everybody laughing. German was tedious. On the days when this was the only language allowed to be spoken, Missy went dumb. Polly stared in dismay at first, but finally even she was worn down by it.

At the end of a month in response to a letter from Fräulein Künde, Johnny came out again to see the girls and try to cure their home-sickness. He didn't mind doing this at all. Not on account of the little girls naturally, but because he had had the most wonderful week in Cologne at Grandmamma's expense, and loved the idea of repeating it.

Also he fancied seeing more of Ethel Olixmannher. Seeing more of Ethel was easy for any man, for she had the 1875

equivalent of IT. Ethel's initials were S.A. in large letters, and before very long the little girls were to discover that she was no ordinary sharer of a bedroom. Missy thought it very unladylike; Polly was interested. At this point Ethel was Polly's only link with sanity in a world that had gone strangely cock-eyed for her.

Ethel disapproved of school at a time when she thought she ought to be doing something far more interesting. She was quick at her studies, but quicker at other things. One eye on Göethe, she had the other out of the window on the *Wilhelmstrasse*, when the Death's Head Hussars marched down it with too-tight trousers and waving plumes faithful to martial tradition. Ethel had a great love of military display, and somehow or other she had managed to attract the attention of the *Oberleutnant*. She had apparently accomplished the impossible from behind the windows of the school.

For a little while the *Oberleutnant* was content to strut past the house, showing off his finery like a Spring-time cock pigeon, and very fine he was with his spurs and epaulettes, a great deal of blue and gold on the breast, white tight trousers and gleaming sword carried at the ready. But a man cannot live by swagger alone, even though he may be Teutonic. This thing obviously had to be carried a little further, and before very long the *Oberleutnant* took to coming into the little garden at night, finding that someone—it is not difficult to imagine who it could have been—had conveniently left the door ajar for him. He would stand under the bedroom window half hidden by gardenias, saying quite the silliest things to Ethel Olixmannher, who did her drooping lily act over the balcony. This murmured conversation was the reason why Polly applied herself to more intensive study of the German language; she knew that it wouldn't be so much fun if she missed half of what was being said.

Missy didn't try to listen; she just lay and sobbed. Polly

sitting up, her knees hunched and her thin little arms round them, was swung two ways, from her sobbing sister to her artful and protesting friend on the balcony.

When Jofinny arrived he saw less of Ethel than he had hoped, for she was much occupied with the *Oberleutnant*. Johnny had brought the girls some summer hats, some chocolate, and he explained to Missy that it was no good kicking up a fuss, for if she thought that she was coming home she had got it quite wrong; she wasn't. She was here for some years.

'Years,' gasped poor Missy, in horror.

'Yes, years,' said Johnny.

'But why?'

'Because Mamma is going to marry old Brown,' said Johnny, speaking plainly.

'But she can't be.'

'If he will, she will,' explained Johnny with brutal truth.

He said all this at the *Domeplatz* and Missy had immediate hysterics, which enraged Johnny so much that he threw a glass of water in her face which caused a scene. Afterwards, when she had come to a little he drove both girls back. Missy was slumped into a corner of the chaise.

'You don't really think Mamma will do anything so silly?'" Polly asked him.

'Yes, I do. She's all ready for it. She's been after it ever since he got into the house; you could see that she has.

His major cause of worry was whether he could get the little girls' money out of trust, before old Brown did it for him! He had a theory that getting the money into what he was pleased to call 'safe custody' might be a bit difficult, but was making it his own particular business these days. A couple of thousand pounds with accumulated interest was in his opinion going begging. Not to be sneezed at, thought Johnny, and anyway Missy didn't deserve it. It would be the making of Missy if she had to look after herself, as he knew.

'Mamma couldn't marry Mr. Brown,' said Polly quite pathetically as they approached the *Wilhelmstrasse*.

'Of course she can, and of course she will. So will he. I don't suppose he cares twopence for her, but he'll never get another job, and he knows it.'

'But he's so well born, he could get any job anywhere,' urged Polly, well instructed by her Mamma.

'Well, is he so well born? Where is that earl he keeps alluding to? He's never been near Swaffham, and I bet you he never will. I suspect if the truth were known, he has never even heard of old Brown,' and there probably Master Johnny Gardner hit the nail firmly on the head.

'It's all rather dreadful for us,' said Polly.

She had an inkling that even though the lindens were in flower, and the window boxes brimming with profuse petunias and poinsettias, something very unhappy was coming into her little life. The little girl had been born under an unlucky star.

* * *

Bonn turned out better than the first few weeks had suggested it would. Just at first the language difficulty was so bewildering. The food also was not sufficient. It was of poor quality and although it might look pretty was never satisfying. But eventually even the lachrymose Missy had to give up the attempt to get back to Swaffham.

Mamma wrote regularly, so did Eleanor Magee, giving the other side of Mamma's picture. The little woman was budding out. Mr. Brown was becoming more and more at home. The middle class humdrum life went on above the shop, it had Victorian exactitude, it was scheduled and rigorous. Meanwhile in Bonn two little girls were being educated to something entirely different.

When they had finished their morning's reading in the large bleak sitting-room, they went out in a crocodile with one of the *Fräuleins*. It was two and two with eyes front. Not Ethel Olixmannher's eyes of course, but everybody

else's. Returning to *mittagessen* they had a subsequent short rest, or walked round the room for deportment balancing a book on the head. On summer afternoons they reclined in the garden, or went up the Rhine in a steamer, flags flying and a band playing. Or they practised their music with Herr Teitz who was dashing. In the summer he wore a smart white duck suit, and on special occasion 'lavender kids' and a baby boy hat in white linen. In the evenings they went to the opera, or to lectures on subjects that the Fräuleins considered to be interesting. Or if the evening were spent at home, they danced to the music of Herr Teitz's rather nauseous violin. Or it was lace-making night, when they sewed and chatted!

Tuition included entering a room gracefully, and leaving it with precision; or how to converse at a dinner party, or when dancing. Imaginary conversations were started by one of the Fräuleins (acting as the young gentleman) and she expected all the right answers and in the proper places.

'And how do you like Bonn, Fräulein?'

(Correct answer): 'I find Bonn delightful.'

'Would the Fräulein permit me to drive you out into the woods one afternoon?'

(Correct answer): 'I will acquaint my Mamma or the Fräuleins of your enquiry.'

'Nothing would give me greater happiness than to drive out with you.'

(Correct answer): 'Sir, I should be enchanted.'

They were taught how to address royal personages serene or otherwise, how to follow the chaperone into the ballroom hands folded, rising well out of the waist, and eyes averted. How to reprove a suitor who was too on-coming, which was a lesson never easily learnt by Ethel Olixmannher who liked them on-coming, and how to appear at dignified ease on all occasions.

When not dancing they went to bed early, which would perhaps be more truthfully described as they went upstairs

early, for not all went to bed. Missy did! She would tuck her head under the clothes so that she should see or hear nothing nasty. Polly listened and looked. Ethel had several different *modi operandi*. The vine served her as an escalator! She either went down it, hand over hand, her petticoats swinging in the breeze, and so flop into the arms of a German *Oberleutnant* waiting in tantalization below, or she hauled him up the vine by his epaulettes, which was more complicated, and sometimes one wondered which would give first, the vine or the epaulettes.

When Ethel went down the vine, Polly arranged a pillow in her bed, turned out the lights and prayed for the best if any of the *Fräuleins* came round. She knew there was no hope of Ethel returning before the morning.

Sometimes Ethel and the beloved drove into Cologne, sometimes they went to the forests, or down to the Rhine. With the first early sunshine, the clapping of a horse's hoofs down the *Wilhelmstrasse* would be the signal for Polly to go to her balcony, hoping the pretty gentleman would not see her in her shift waving her night-cap to show all was well, then help Ethel up the vine again. Ethel would be thrilled. Her face would be pinkly jubilant, her bodice ribbons dangling, and she would babble about it all having been too utterly utter.

'I think,' said Missy, 'that Ethel is both unladylike and common.'

Eventually Ethel got rid of Missy who was always feeling so aristocratically ill, persuading her to sleep in another room with two younger girls who admired her. The *Fräuleins'* sanction for this alteration was obtained, obviously when they were under the influence of the light Rhine wine they drank in heavy quantities, and after that of course everything went gloriously. Polly was shocked; she knew that everything was quite wrong but she was enjoying being shocked.

If the *Oberleutnant* was hauled up the vine there was the additional agony that someone would hear him, for his

boots scraped on the brick façade, and he was so fitted out with spurs and medals for the glory of the *Vaterland* that he jingled madly all the way up. In awkward moments such as when anyone rapped at the door, they pushed him under the bed (they had tried the wardrobe, but the door wouldn't shut properly, for he was a fat young man and bulged). Polly never felt particularly safe when they harboured the *Oberleutnant*, it was far safer when Ethel went down the vine and off to the woods till dawn.

I don't know how much of this ever registered with Polly. Her knowledge of the facts of life were Victorianly nebulous. At Swaffham the stork and the gooseberry bush had been the contradictory stories put over by Miss Eleanor Magee and Miss Winterbourne. Grandmamma never discussed anything so intimate. She would have termed such things as 'the indecencies of life', believing that complete ignorance of anything of the kind was the role to adopt. A husband was the person to talk to a daughter of the house, which naturally saved dear Mamma from a lot of unpleasantness. Thank God my girls are innocent, she would brag, and I think she believed it although they were now with Ethel Olixmannher who had never been innocent, even on the day she was born.

Conscience, that prime reminder, must have warned little Polly Gardner that it was all rather peculiar, but I doubt if it was anything more.

One unhappy day Ethel's mamma discovering her whereabouts came to visit her. If any mistake had been made about Ethel, no mistake at all could have been made about her mamma, and the *Fräuleins* were deeply shocked to find her sitting in their salon. They had never met this woman before, but had been foolishly impressed by the liaison with the minor royalty conveyed to them on heavily coronetted and be-eagled notepaper. The *Fräuleins* had flattered themselves that it was one of those morgantic alliances which are really not too utterly wicked, and faced with this obvious

daughter of life's oldest profession, were horrified to discover that it was purely a little ostentatious 'basketwork'. Grand Dukes are impressive, and this one had been so useful to quote to parents (Grandmamma amongst them, it had worked wonders for Grandmamma's quiet Swaffham life), therefore it was disastrous to see their very best bit of propaganda going west.

Ethel's mother, over-powdered at a period of history when no nice woman used powder (even discreetly) and being very noticeably what my great-aunts would have called 'one of those', not caring to pollute their lips with any more descriptive word, had sat herself down. They wondered why she had come. Before long she explained her mission which was to borrow a little in advance. All accounts were rendered to the Grand Duke and paid by him. His lady friend had long since quarrelled with him and thought that it ought to be too simple to stipulate for something extra under some ambiguous heading such as 'art lessons', 'dancing', or 'music', suggesting that then she could draw on the Fräuleins who would reimburse themselves from the Grand Duke. He, poor man, would never have any idea of what was going on!

The Fräuleins were horrified.

They were ashamed that this disgraceful woman had come to the house at all, and, although it might be distasteful, decided the only thing they could do would be to ask the Grand Duke to remove his daughter. It so happened that there proved to be no need for this.

Ethel, whilst walking out in the crocodile, had contacted a Servian Princeling, which surely must have been the only case on record. Polly declared that at one end of the street she didn't know him, at the other she did, never having left the crocodile for a single moment of that time!

The *Oberleutnant* was away on manœuvres at Potsdam; no longer did he come up the vine doing considerable damage to it, for he was a plump young man. Now the

Servian Princeling found the gate conveniently open, enabling him to hang about the garden. He had a handsome dark appearance with languorous eyes, and wore a chaste uniform with lots of pale blue and silver about it. Why he wore a uniform at all, when he was merely a student at the university, nobody really knows, but those were the musical-comedy days, and young gents did themselves well with a spot of glamour, dressing carefully for the part. We, in our far duller twentieth century, fail to appreciate what fun they had in the 1870's. After all, chaperones were merely invented to be circumvented, and Romeo knew the best use for a balcony.

* * *

The carnival came round, this lasting for three thrilling days when everybody went gay. Any nonsense was tolerated during this time as being 'sporting'. You could, in fact, pretty well do what you liked.

On the very first evening to start the party well, a band of rowdy young students broke into Fräulein Künde's house after the girls and chased them round. The girls all pretended to be very shocked, and Polly, who was one of the younger ones, hid in a boot cupboard under the stairs and came out smothered in dust. Ethel Olixmannher didn't hide; she knew better.

The Fräuleins rushed about trying to shoo the objectionable young men out of the place, but there were two staircases and as fast as some of them were chivvied down the front lot, a party of rowdies were pushing their way up the back. It was considered poor form to lose your temper at the carnival, which was a grand excuse for a lot of licence and (much as the Fräuleins must have loathed it) they had to accept it with the best grace that they could muster. They just pretended that it was all rather a good joke!

Eventually when the decorated town was aglow with coloured lamps and Chinese lanterns everybody put on

little black masks and cloaks, and out into the street they went. The, Fräuleins, like idiots, took the girls out, chaperoning them carefully. I should have thought that it was asking for trouble, and before very long they got it. The crocodile became cut in two. A lot of young men surrounded Missy (she was masked, otherwise it.couldn't have happened) and they started kissing the back of her neck and pinching her behind. It seems to me that there is no variety in the code. We may think we have new ideas in 1950 but the wiles are old ones. She was so angry that forgetting the spirit expected in the carnival week, she turned round and slapped somebody really hard. It was quite probably the wrong man; it gerferally is!

'English,' snapped somebody.

Fräulein Künde saw this going on and made desperate efforts to shove her way through the crowd and rescue Missy, and whilst she was doing this Ethel did a flit. As it was quite impossible to get the crocodile home, so to speak, in one piece, the Fräuleins shuffled along the ones they could collar and left Ethel to fend for herself.

On the second day of the carnival Ethel became permanently adrift. In the battle of flowers she had last been sighted throwing gardenias at a handsome young man on a white horse! Within the week she and her Servian Princeling were living at his august father's expense, in a luxury apartment in Belgrade. She had the largest solitaire in the city. She called herself the Princess something quite unpronounceable.

The babble in the school went on unrestrainedly. They were intensely interested, but they were never to know any more. At the time of King Edward the Seventh's coronation Polly and her friend Mary Leigh were staying in Wiesbaden and saw Ethel, old and painted, soliciting in the gutter!

But she'd had her fun!

* * *

Polly's next friend was the antithesis of Ethel

Olixmannher. It was the second of the Leigh girls, and though Polly died nearly a quarter of a century before Mary Leigh, the friendship endured to that very day.

The Leighs' father owned cotton mills in the North and the family was well off. But in those days people however rich were not lavish. There were of course the aristocrats, the young bloods and mashers who drank champagne out of ladies' shoes, and gave golden sovereigns for single roses from flower girls outside the Pavilion, but the ordinary middle-class family was economically minded. Extravagance was frowned upon. Clothes were coddled, and a definite line drawn between 'best' and 'second-best', this line extending to food and drink also, and ultimately to cups and saucers and silver. Yet they were very extravagant in some ways, for servants and carriages could never be restricted; they were the modest essentials to living.

Mr. Leigh was determined to educate his daughters well, and Kate, the eldest of the three, was the oldest girl in the *Wilhelmstrasse* and she hated it. She disliked French and German, and she could not see eye to eye with the Fräuleins. She was far too old to be there at all. Besides an education reaching into the twenties was at that time highly dangerous, because at twenty-three a girl was an 'old maid', and to be an old maid was to have missed your mission in life and docketed yourself as a failure. No old maid was ever given the benefit of the doubt. It was understood that she could never have been asked. She became at once a 'poor thing', she was sympathized with, if not treated as a worrisome 'half-sharp' on a par with the governess and the companion.

Kate was pretty. Mary, the next daughter, was scholastic; Alice the youngest one was delicate. This meant that Alice could not share in the long walks, the swimming in those *Baden* in the mountains to which they sometimes trudged on summer mornings.

Mary Leigh was very small with rosiest health. She applied herself diligently to her studies and spoke both French

and German astoundingly well, never making a mistake with those conflicting genders that got everybody else into a hole!

Mary worked really hard, and it was the most unfortunate thing that her eyes should fail her. Before very long she was destined to spend some weeks in a dark room. Polly was a sympathetic little girl, and finding this out she went to Mary and offered to read aloud to her to beguile away some of the tedium of those long hours. She had always had a passion for reading aloud. After this she spent some hours a day sitting on the landing, outside the darkened room, with the door ajar so that Mary Leigh could hear her. Like this the two girls became fast friends. Ultimately when Mary emerged into a twilight and later in the full light of day it was an understood thing that they went everywhere together.

This friendship was to stand staunch to the end. It was strange that it lasted as it did, for although Polly was fond of studies she had none of Mary's scholastic fervour, and there were so many points on which one would hardly have thought that they saw eye to eye. But apparently they did, and like this Polly saw less of Missy and much more of Mary. Her vision changed.

CHAPTER FOUR

DURING THE LAST TWO YEARS AT BONN, ELEANOR MAGEE'S letters to the girls prepared them for trouble at home. Polly had come to look upon it all as being inevitable, but apparently Missy hadn't, and when the news ultimately dawned on them she went to bed and ran Grandmamma into a heavy doctor's bill.

'But Missy, it's no good,' Polly told her.

'I don't care! I'll never go back. If Mamma marries Mr. Brown I'll put myself into the Rhine. I will. You'll see I will.'

'Oh, don't be so silly. What good'll that do?' asked Polly.

Grandmamma had emerged from her period of mourning and was bursting to have a really good wedding, with the girls as bridesmaids and Johnny to give her away. If anybody could give Grandmamma away in the fullest meaning of the words, that person was Johnny, but he flatly refused. He said that if she insisted on marrying old Brown, she must do it decently and quietly, and he would not authorize a big wedding.

He had always been able to manage her. There was the usual row in the dining-room, with everybody becoming most vehement and saying too much, and the final conciliatory scene. Of course poor little Grandmamma had believed that the day she went to the church with her beloved, she would come down the aisle as a real lady and everybody would want to know her. Professional people would tea with her on every other Wednesday. She and Mr. Brown would be received at Narford and Narborough. And of course the Earl of Mar and Kellie would invite them to stay.

Poor dear, she was slipping into a quagmire! I do think—if he had ever heard of Mr. Brown—the Earl of Mar and Kellie might have sent them a Christmas card to put on the mantelpiece, but he did damn-all.

Incidentally, after they were married Grandmamma took to quoting him, saying that she would be going to stay at 'his place after Easter', which was awkward because when it came to it she did not know where his 'place' was, and in this dilemma dear Mr. Brown couldn't help her.

Unfortunately Grandmamma's income was getting jeopardized. The shop was not doing so well. People had been used to the amiable and attentive ministrations of my Grandpapa who was always kind; they had gathered that Mr. Brown did not know very much about the business. There was another chemist in the place, and as this one went down, he went up. Mortifying for poor little Grandmamma, who, herself deeply in love, was indignant that anyone should do this for her darling Mr. Brown.

Johnny had been waiting for a long time for this situation. It was manna in his desert of retrenchment, and lately his desert had gone over dry. It was he who suggested that Grandmamma should tap the little girls' resources, quite conscientiously of course, and with only the idea of bettering the little girls' position in the long run. Then he said he could start a business of his own, one of those gilt-edged securities bound to be a success, and this would surprise everybody. At first Grandmamma thought this a most improper suggestion, where of course she was entirely right. However the urgency of keeping the elegant Mr. Brown's attention focused on herself, and the retrenchment becoming ever more obvious in her home (also the need for getting Johnny into a permanent job and off her hands and out of the house) all combined to push her rather hard.

I am sure she never did it willingly, for whatever her faults, she was a very just woman. She was coerced into it. She put her faith in foolish people. She swore by her son,

when she should have sworn at him. She could not see beyond Mr. Brown. He was the Prince Albert to her Victoria, and her Victoria was very staunch. Grandmamma dropped her major brick.

* * *

With Johnny off to a fascinating little business the other side of the county, she had the house to herself. She had all the maternal confidence in her son.

He was in many ways a promising young man, always bringing home silver cups that he had won, gay in conversation, merry in manner, but Johnny and economy were foes. He just did not understand it.

With the house left to herself and to Mr. Brown, Grandmamma prayed that the income would soon improve. Now she wondered if she should have sold the shop when at peak pitch, and perhaps have invested the money in something in the professional line to give genteel Mr. Brown a chance to better himself.

She had such faith in him, poor little woman! She never saw what a goose her swan was! She believed lack of opportunity had hampered him, and given a chance he would prove his immense ability to the world, but alas either the chance never came or he hadn't the ability—what am I to judge which it was?—but in the end poor Grandmamma was completely disillusioned.

Her engagement was announced. She thought that this would completely unbalance Swaffham, but they had seen it coming. This annoyed Grandmamma who had hoped for a furore!

The wedding was hurried up, after all Grandmamma was no longer a girl, and precious time was being wasted, so she set about arranging a really élite honeymoon, one that should impress the whole neighbourhood with the immense change made in her social position. For Grandmamma intended going abroad.

Ladies of her status did not travel on the Continent. Only aristocratic women did that, and this, she felt, should set the cachet on her life and indicate to all concerned that she had passed into a far more exalted sphere. She was no longer the widow of John Gardner, chemist, but the glowing bride of Arthur Mavor Brown, with the Mar and Kellie relationship well to the fore. No June bride blushed more rosily than did this poor little woman, nor throw herself into a more careless rapture.

She wanted a romantic wedding with the girls as bridesmaids, but was talked out of this. She had a quiet ceremony early one morning, which in itself must have been a blow to the poor darling's pride. Eleanor Magee had written to the girls who had taken the engagement differently. Missy cried a good deal, Polly knew that it was bound to come and therefore accepted it. They were not interested in the wedding, and details of it were glossed over. All they knew was that the bride and bridegroom had started for the Continent, one imagines on Grandmamma's money, for certain it is that dear handsome Mr. Brown hadn't a couple of florins to jingle together in his pocket. His contribution to the ménage was that rich blue blood of his. However, he looked the height of aristocracy in his freshly brushed Dundrearys, and his best face cloth fawn trouserings.

Grandmamma crossed the Channel amply fortified with brandy. She faced the way she was going all the time, anticipating shipwreck at any moment even in that glassy sea. The second they went aboard, the bridegroom fitted himself out in a cloth cap with ear flaps, and produced binoculars to give the journey tone. It all went to show how well used to travelling aristocratic people were.

Rooms had been engaged for the happy pair in a quiet back street of Cologne. In those days hotels were considered fast, & not definitely dangerous. Besides honeymoons demanded a certain aloofness, it was considered indelicate if one mixed too much with the *hoi-polloi*.

They drove over to Bonn sitting in a cab and admiring the freshness of everything. It must have been a brave new world beyond Swaffham. What she thought of it all, goodness only knows. She was immensely impressed by the opulence of the majestic house in *Wilhelmstrasse*, and was ushered into the salon to drink wine with the Fräuleins Künde.

This was not at all an easy meeting for the girls and Grandmamma and Mr. Brown. They came into the salon to meet their new papa. Eleanor Magee had given thoughtful advice in her letters; it would be hard at first, but possibly easier later. Nothing would be gained by a lack of duty. Missy had never cared for her own father but cared less for Mr. Brown. Polly had cared for John Gardner and never forgot him all her life, even though she had been such a little child when he had died. She had always loathed Mr. Brown and saw him now sitting smiling over his dreadful Dundrearys at the Fräuleins and thought that he looked exactly like a ginger cat before a plate of fresh cream.

The girls met him frigidly.

They all went for a trip up the Rhine; they saw the Lorelei, and Grandmamma was in a first-class sentimental mood which was just right for the Lorelei. The thought of the *schönste mädchen* was one that she could apply to herself, for had she not been Mr. Brown's *schönste mädche*? Mr. Brown said nothing but sighed heavily as they went past the Lorelei, the little band playing, the little flags flying. The girls standing stock still eyed the loving couple with some disfavour.

They went to the opera, which bored Grandmamma who had never been to opera before, and although she admired the works of dear Mr. Sidney Smith devotedly, could see nothing at all in Wagner. Skedaddling about the Continent was not really her *métier*. Also the first prickings of disillusion were in her heart. Mr. Brown had tried to convey the impression that he had done this sort of thing before. He knew about five words of indifferent French, and the

first thing that he did was to prove beyond all doubt that he had attached the wrong interpretation to all of them. This was gall and wormwood to Grandmamma, who had not believed that anything so awful could happen.

Also the girls were being very naughty, she said. Sitting in a street café, she had suggested that now Mr. Brown was one of the family, he should be alluded to as Pápa. This suggestion had fallen upon extremely unfertile ground. It was ignored. There was a deadly silence that was annoying whilst Mr. Brown sucked the crested knob of his stick and stared at the horizon, after which Grandmamma started to lay down the law. The girls went cold.

Four days later funds having become exhausted (it was quite wickedly expensive on the Continent, said Grandmamma) they returned to Swaffham. Now she was a lady!

Surely the whole of Swaffham would realize this? They must have known it by his drawl, his silences haughty and aristocratic, and that pleasant little habit he had of humming the Eton boating song whilst working amongst bottles behind the counter. Poor Grandmamma, she was so very Eton-boating-song-minded, and alas, it was all for nothing!

They had a choppy return crossing, disastrous to poor Mr. Brown, who looked like a lettuce and was miserably sick. Grandmamma (who was not amused) had to hold his head and wrote in her journal that she 'was most mortified'.

Worse was to come.

Swaffham did not change one whit towards her. She was worse off than she had been before, for her funds were running out on her. People took their custom elsewhere. They did not believe in aristocratic chemists. The girls would have to leave Bonn and come home sooner than she had intended, because the fees were so heavy. She did not want two daughters home, she wanted dear Mr. Brown to herself, but what could she do?

Nobody called.

Poor little Grandmamma had the 'drawing-room' all

dolled up for at-home afternoons, the best teapot, fresh cakes, everything as it should be, but nobody came. She may have been a silly little woman, but there is something rather pathetic about the memory of her sitting waiting for the sound of a ring that she was never to hear. Swaffham had seen through Mr. Brown and she hadn't. That was the truth of the matter.

The girls talked over the marriage in Bonn. They knew something more than a disastrous marriage was afoot, because Grandmamma was constantly bickering with the Fräuleins. The bills for extras were more than she could stomach.

There had been a time in Grandmamma's life when she would have thought it exceedingly unladylike to haggle over a few pounds for extras. Ten marks for a straw hat would never have given her a second thought, but it did now. She wrote at length to the Fräuleins, the letters were crossed and doubled-crossed, so that nobody could read them, far less a foreigner, which was perhaps just as well. Her letters met with stony replies from the Fräuleins, written in far too faultless English and leaving Grandmamma purple in the face with fury.

At sixteen and seventeen the girls dressed alike, looking all twenty-six. They wore long frocks much looped about the hips and fitted into an eighteen-inch waist. Hair was smugly parted in the centre and looped back in that engaging fashion, known as 'a teapot handle'. They wore black bonnets tied under the chin. Polly had never been a pretty girl, she was too pale with one of those tissue paper skins, and dark blue eyes. She had, however, the most enchantingly gay personality, and a delicious sense of humour. She laughed at life.

'But why is Mamma so mean?' she enquired.

Missy couldn't think. Now they could get no new clothes

at all. Grandmamma showed a most unreasonable increasing stinginess. Polly's yearnings for a new 'fishwife shirt' (then the latest and smartest thing to have) were squashed peremptorily from Swaffham. The old frocks would have to serve another term. The Fräuleins complained that though they wrote to Grandmamma asking for replenishments they could get nothing out of her.

Eleanor Magee wrote, hoping very much that although she never actually explained matters, the girls would be able to read between the lines. She said that Grandmamma had been having a good many private difficulties and changes were made in the house. Barbara had been pensioned off, and the carriage sold. One servant had been dismissed and done without, which was a dreadful loss of caste for Grandmamma but definitely necessary to salvation.

The long and short of it was that the business was rapidly going down the hill, due to an elegant gentleman who drawled fashionably behind the counter, but did very little else.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE GIRLS HAD THOUGHT OF MARRIAGE.

Their last few weeks at Bonn, the Fräuleins spoke of it as the next certainty round the corner. The officers came in for evening parties and danced with them, whilst Herr Teitz played on his violin. There was a little balcony work and riding in the woods together. One young gentleman who took Polly out was definitely ardent. He was handsome, he had fought an amazing duel and had won, was a baron, and therefore to be encouraged. Missy didn't like it at all. Afterwards she told her sister that it would be singularly out of place if she were the first to marry. They must—they simply **MUST**—stick to their proper turns, and Missy was fourteen months senior in the race. She had that much start. It would be quite insulting of Polly if she married before her elder sister, said Missy, and wept over it.

Polly was penitent. She promised faithfully that she would follow her sister to the altar as head bridesmaid and they planned a delightful wedding—in fact they were always planning a delightful wedding for Missy, regardless of the fact that they had forgotten the one essential to all weddings—a bridegroom!

Polly had never thought of marrying the baron; he was just good fun. Just as now, in the last few weeks, everything in Bonn was amusing and gay. The homesickness had left her. Was not Mary Leigh her friend? Missy had chummed-up with a little girl called Muriel Walker, who thought that an elder friend was rather good to have. Johnny was to fetch the girls home.

'I don't know that I want to go back,' said Polly as the time grew near.

'I don't want to stay at school, I'm a young lady now and school's silly,' said Missy.

'Well, I think it's all rather fun.'

They went up the Rhine for the last time; they went to the opera; Polly drove with the baron, and then Johnny appeared in Cologne all set for the homeward journey.

Johnny was living in Swaffham again; something had happened to the business the other side of the county; it is fairly easy to surmise what it might have been. He knew better than to live in the house with the happy pair, but was just round the corner, and he said that everything was going well.

'But what does Mamma say to having you there and not in the house?' asked Polly.

'Mamma has to lump it.'

'Yes, but you know what she is. All those questions, and wondering if you are in at night.'

'She's got a good idea that I'm not in at night.'

'Oh Johnny!'

It struck Polly even then that it was a little odd, for Master Johnny drew all his resources from Grandmamma, and, love him as she might, she was pretty quick on tightening the purse strings should she consider his behaviour in need of correction. Also, she appreciated personal respect, but apparently none of this worried dear Johnny any more. He refused to be fussed about his proper behaviour to his dear Mamma.

'You wait till she finds out what you are doing,' warned Polly.

'She can't do anything if she does,' he announced, and it was true. For the first time in her life, poor little Grandmamma had burnt her fingers—and badly!

Johnny brought the girls safely back to Swaffham. They looked out of the window of the train and saw the familiar station looking as dully plain as it had always done. Perhaps a little more so by comparison with the gay Continent.

Nothing ever altered in Swaffham. The luggage would be wheeled up to the house by an out-porter Snookey Lack, whom they had left as a chorister with a fine soprano voice and who was now a grown man. They had to walk. The Miss Gardners had never had to walk before and they realized as they went that in this respect things were going to be very different.

Swaffham looked to be devastatingly dull. It horrified Polly when she remembered that she had got to live here, and she could not think how she would manage it.

'Oh Johnny, how dull it looks!'

'It always was a beastly dull hole,' said he.

'Yes, but not as bad as this. It looks so dingy.'

'Always was, my dear,' said Johnny, 'always will be. Last place God ever made, if you ask me.'

As they went along the street they met the young Plowrights, William and his younger brother Wally. Missy, when enumerating the runners-up for her hand, had considered William Plowright as a possible starter. But his family ran a hardware shop which was hardly her idea of social uplift, and, as she said, definitely beneath her, though how they worked that out with the chemist's shop behind them, I have never yet understood.

Marriage was tremendously important. It was the only career for a girl. One started at fifteen making a list of 'gentlemen' who would be suitable. One cast a suspicious eye on all acquaintances, and looked hopefully at anything over sixteen and under seventy. You never knew. Whether marriage turned out to be happy or bitterly unhappy, there was always the major consolation that it was far better than being left an old maid. That of course was unthinkable! You married anybody rather than that. The young Plowrights (thought about avidly whilst away) looked a bit drab after the *Oberleutnants*, the baron and Ethel's Servian Princeling in their musical-comedy uniforms. Here there was no music, no flags, and no gaiety. It wasn't a bit as they had

remembered, which of course is the hard part of life. Memory is the most arrant cheat.

'How you girls have grown!' said Wally looking admiringly at Polly.

Wally was a gay young fellow, he could hardly be classified as an eligible, because he could never settle down to a job, but he talked amusingly and was a performer of clever practical jokes then in such prevailing good taste. He liked Polly, and rather wished he had not been caught in his second-best coat, the one he wore in the shop, and also delivering cake tins which ought to have been done by the errand boy. William was more at ease, he was an earnest young man, and he thought that Missy looked frightful—where had she bought that bonnet?—but he made polite remarks of a stilted nature and then took his brother off with him, cake tins and all.

'Well, girls,' said Johnny, as the little trio went up the street, 'there won't be much of a choice here for you when husbands are doled out. You could do worse than the Plowright chaps, at any rate there's one apiece.'

'Oh Johnny, how could you?' said Missy, but was secretly rather pleased. She had buttonholed William for herself. The shop would take some swallowing, but anything would be better than home with Mamma and Mr. Brown.

They turned into the house.

Grandmamma had not expected them so soon, and was asleep on the sofa, her cap awry, her mouth wide open and snoring vilely. She looked terrible. As she entered the room, it struck poor little Polly that it had grown smaller and duller; there was none of the airy spaciousness of the salons in Bonn which once she had thought so crude and bald, but which now she liked. There were no flowers. The windows had no beckoning petunias and fuchsias, there was no essence of tuberose and acacia, or the lovely July sweetness of lindens in blossom. It was terribly disappointing.

I don't think I can bear this—any of it—she thought.

Grandmamma woke with a start and was annoyed at having been caught this way. Up she sat, and her cap fell over one ear.

'You're early,' snapped Grandmamma, which wasn't true. The fact of the matter was that she was late. 'Where's the tea? Where's Mr. Brown? Can nobody do anything in this house but your poor Mamma? What's happened to those maids? You girls don't know how obstinate they are all becoming, they take the greatest advantage of one these days; I'm sure I never know what I pay them for.'

'Tea is just coming,' said Miss Magee slipping off to bustle up the Britannia metal teapot.

She hadn't changed. Polly saw that at a glance, but about the rest of the house there was a subtle difference, something she could not place, but which was there. The atmosphere was not the same. It was strained.

What was really happening was that Johnny was frittering away the money, whilst Mr. Brown was frittering away the business. It was not vice on Mr. Brown's part (he had no vices) but he was hopelessly inefficient. What was a great deal worse was that Grandmamma now knew it, and it was the most dreadful blow to her pride. Grandmamma had broken her heart secretly, but defiantly refused to admit failure to the world. What was worse still was the financial difficulty. She could and would camouflage the love chaos of a desperately unhappy marriage to the people of Swaffham, but she was also threatened with poverty which was a bird of quite another feather, and impossible to conceal, try as she would.

She realized that she ought never to have allowed herself to be bamboozled into helping her co-trustee get his fingers on to the little girls' money. She had been desperately wrong, but her love for her son and her anxiety to do well with Mr. Brown had completely blinded her. She kept worrying as to how to extricate herself from this

mess, but realized that if she made any move at all, she would only involve herself yet deeper, and ruin Johnny with her.

Naturally her temper—never her strong point—suffered from her anxiety; she was dreadfully worried.

Tea was hurriedly brought in by a flustered maid. The girls had always looked forward to this, their first tea at home, cake, and boiled eggs, watercress, cold meat and raw beef sandwiches to support Mr. Brown, now *in extremis* after a tiring day of gruelling work! In came Mr. Brown from the shop, to take down his smoking cap hung behind the door, and put it atop his ginger head and to sit where once poor John Gardner had sat. He had nothing to say to his step-daughters. He eyed them miserably.

‘Poor Mr. Brown is so over-worked. He never spares himself,’ sighed Grandmamma keeping up the pretence about his activities, ‘but then we are all worked to death these days, you girls don’t know what life is like here. You’ve had everything done for you.’

Down she sank on the sofa again, still bearing marks of her indolent afternoon, which had been spent sprawled on it to rest. It did not seem a very satisfactory home-coming. Things had changed, that was obvious.

Johnny ate heartily, wolfing down all the delicious raw beef sandwiches before Mr. Brown could get a look in. He knew that his step-father would never dare to reprove him, but would only look discreetly hurt, which merely amused Johnny.

It was a most unpleasant tea; Grandmamma, rudely awakened, was ripe for a row; Miss Magee tried to pour oil on troubled waters whilst Mr. Brown stared gloomily into space.

‘Can’t you say anything?’ Grandmamma snapped at him finally.

He couldn’t. As far as he was concerned life was a menace. Mumbling something incoherent he rose, leaving the for-

gathered family round the tea and returning to the shop where he failed so lamentably. He had made a major mistake too. Grandmamma was quite all right as long as her husband had the whip hand. Mr. Brown was far too genteel for whip hands. John Gardner had told her to hold her tongue and have done with it, and whilst he lived there had been peace in the house, but now she was a little martinet who had got the bit between her teeth. The wretched girls knew that they had come home to Bedlam.

* * *

In their own rooms Eleanor Magee told them a little of what was happening. At thirty-seven Eleanor looked to be quite an old woman, the first seeds of consumption were showing in her, poor thing, and she knew then that she would not be able to stay here very long. She was intensely sorry for the two girls, and her advice was that they married the first man who came along and offered to them. Eleanor Magee felt for Grandmamma too; so disappointed that her marriage had not turned her into a lady, and now blaming the name over the shop front for everything. People did not forget a name, especially Swaffham people, and it was all very well for dear Mr. Brown to go about bragging of his relationship with the Earl of Mar and Kellie, the trouble was the wretched earl had never materialized. A mere baronet in the hand was worth two earls in Mar or Kellie, as Grandmamma very well knew! She must have become gradually suspicious that she was the only poor boob who had fallen for the bait.

Unfortunately somebody—Wally Plowright was suspected—had put a devastating note through the front door one Valentine's Day, with a coronet frolicking on it, and a clumsy thumbnail sketch of Mr. Brown chasing it in a high hat. Underneath was written:

If only I could catch
up with it. . . .

This had sent Grandmamma into screaming hysterics and Mr. Brown into a deadly silence (simply because he did not know what to say) which was nearly as bad.

'I am afraid, dears, it isn't going to be easy,' said Eleanor Magee, and it wasn't easy at all! Polly wrote a long letter to Mary Leigh about it, Missy wrote her tale of woe to her only friend, little Muriel Walker.

They had both looked forward to their arrival back and being really grown-up young ladies of fashion, to wearing new frocks, putting up the hair, and going out to parties at the Assembly rooms. Also, not a little, to the young gentlemen who undoubtedly would come to woo. Missy first—that had been arranged—Polly, next!

The girls ultimately 'came out' at a dance held in the Assembly rooms. Missy wore pink tarlatan, and Polly was in pale blue, not at all her colour. She wore a wreath of little silver leaves in her hair, and whereas Missy went with the express intention of looking elegant, Polly went to have a spree. Their hair was heavily pomaded, and looped round the crown, and each wore a chaste locket with dear Papa's picture tastefully disclosed in it.

Grandmamma escorted them as chaperone in quantities of fuchsia-coloured velvet and watered silk. Her locket showed dear Mr. Brown, and she wore coral earrings which seemed to put inches on to her nose. She was capped in maroon lace and rustled ostentatiously as she walked. She also had looked forward to this day as one of THE days. Her two little dears were now to be launched into Swaffham society, though what Swaffham society exactly was, I cannot imagine, but as far as Grandmamma was concerned, it was the hallmark of respectability.

They were announced by the beadle. 'Mrs. Brown, Miss Gardner, and Miss Polly Gardner', and then they all rustled forward, the two girls, as instructed by the Fräuleins (a scene rehearsed a hundred times at Bonn), two paces behind their Mamma, eyes modestly on the fan, hands folded

demurely on the stomach, and looking pretty little pets in pink and blue. This was their moment!

After a few moments' conversation with all and sundry, the girls never speaking unless spoken to and making the most finished (and I should have thought the most finishing) replies to all polite enquiries from friends, Grandmamma established herself on the dowagers' dais, in close proximity to the solicitor's wife, who she hoped would notice her. The girls were furnished with small programmes fixed with tasselled pink pencils (the gentlemen's were blue), and they proceeded to enjoy themselves. They were only permitted two dances with each swain; more would get them talked about, and all the way there Grandmamma had been emphasizing the point that whatever they did, they must be very careful. Although there was a sitting-out room, none but the audacious used it. A nice girl stayed well under the dowagers' eyes, and allowed no rot.

The young Plowrights were there.

'I suppose I'll have to dance with Missy,' said William regretfully; 'it would look pointed if I didn't.'

'I shall dance with Polly,' said Wally, and asked for four dances straight off.

'Don't be a fool!' said Polly, who when not under Mamma's eye had as much go as most of them. 'What would Mamma say?'

'After a couple of hot gins she won't say a thing,' said he.

'But somebody else will tell her,' and Polly drew a line through his name for two of the dances. At the same time she caught sight of William's programme. On it the outrageous Wally had written: Missy Gardner and in brackets (Duty dance).

'She'll see and be dreadfully hurt,' said Polly.

It had already spoilt Missy's evening.

Young Harvey Bloom was there. He was rather a fish out of water, for he had never cared for dancing. He had been brought up by his grandmother at Castleacre where his

grandfather was the vicar, and he intended taking orders, but was at present a Cambridge undergraduate. He was a tall, stout young man, with a mop of curly red hair and a florid amiable face. He suffered badly from a poverty complex, for the Blooms' money had gone into a chancery suit (one of the scandals of that age) and it was extremely unlikely that it would ever come out again. They were always hoping for THE DAY in capital letters, but THE DAY never dawned.

He asked both girls for dances, and much regretted the one he got with Missy who didn't like him and never hesitated to show him that her heart was not with him. Polly liked anybody. She thought that Harvey was amusing, but wished he would get his hair cut, and said so. Personal appearance never worried him. He knew a little of Germany and Belgium, and it was a relief to find somebody who had at least been in that part of the world. She would not have believed that she could be so homesick for it all.

Before long, however, wicked Wally Plowright had had enough of that and whisked Polly away. There was a small balcony to the Assembly rooms, suitably screened from the ballroom. Wally knew all the ropes, and got her out there on the pretence that he was dying for a breath of fresh air.

'Mamma would faint with horror,' said Polly when she found where they were, and alone.

'I know, but I want to talk to you.'

'I confess I dare not stay.' Polly was remembering Ethel and the *Oberleutnant* and the best possible use for balconies.

'Now don't be a little prude.' Wally kissed her audaciously, and the silver wreath came awry so he took it off. 'I'll keep it for you, my pet,' said he.

'You can't do that. Mamma would notice at once it was missing. Give it me back at once.'

'Rot! Mamma has had far too much Marsala and hot gin to notice anything,' and he put it into his pocket.

‘Oh Wally, you are a pest!’

‘But a very nice’ pest. Kiss me again.’

‘I certainly shall do nothing of the sort. What would people say if they knew?’

All lessons on the right answer had gone by the board. Polly was rapidly forgetting the careful tuition of the Fräuleins, and was having a thoroughly delicious time on her own. Unfortunately, although Mamma had done her best by the Marsala and Madeira and the hot gin, she had not gone that far and the moment her younger daughter returned to the quadrilles, noticed that the little silver wreath had gone from her pomaded hair.

‘Good gracious! What’s that child done with her wreath?’ demanded Grandmamma.

Polly had no idea.

It was of course even more annoying to see that Missy, the favourite daughter, had had a lamentably dull time, and still retained her little pink wreath of flowers. The beaux of the place had been remiss. William Plowright had dropped her the very moment that he had finished what was too obviously a duty dance. Wally had given her one dance teasing her the whole time, and making life miserable for her by insisting on the redness of her nose. Harvey Bloom had been polite but quite indifferent to her, besides she didn’t like him anyway. Atty Palmer had rendered himself invisible when the second dance was due, so that she remained as a melancholy wallflower breathing fury.

She had spent two complete dances on the dowagers’ dais with her Mamma (a most humiliating procedure) and Grandmamma was furious. It was the fault of the Swaffham oiks who did not know a lovely, charming and genteel young lady when they met one, but preferred the rather hoydenish and naughty Polly. She’d speak to Polly when she got her home!

Ultimately when dolmans and fascinators had been collected from the ladies’ attiring room, they swept down to

the portico where the hired fly from the 'George' was waiting for them. Missy was a martyr.

'How could you be so mean?' she asked Polly.

'What have I done, pray?'

'And where has your wreath gone?' demanded Grandmamma in stentorian tones.

'It must have blown away,' said Polly, which was just about all she could think of on the spur of the moment.

'BLOWN AWAY? But when were you out of doors to get it BLOWN away?' Grandmamma never drank sweet Marsala and it looked like a dangerous interlude.

'I took a breath of fresh air through an open window. I was so hot with the dancing,' said Polly.

They were getting into the fly, she last of all as the junior member of the party and therefore necessarily the inferior, when Wally came racing out of the Assembly rooms with the silly little silver wreath borne in triumph on his head.

'For pretty Polly Perkins,' said he, and then, with his head stuck through the cab window, he warbled.

A wreath of orange blossoms

When next we met, she wore . . .

It seemed that Grandmamma had not been the only person to tipple on Marsala! She was furious. The only thing that irritated Polly was that Wally apparently didn't give a hoot about getting his beloved into a first-class row, and also he did not want to retain the pretty little silver wreath for keeps.

'That impossible, disgraceful young man,' said Grandmamma.

'He always was a cad,' said Missy.

Polly said nothing.

'Drive off,' directed Grandmamma to the cabman, 'never mind if he comes too. Drive off,' and off they went leaving Wally sprawling. 'And how did he get hold of your wreath, miss?' asked Grandmamma in a fury.

'Really Mamma, I cannot think.'

'You must have given it to him.'

'Oh no, Mamma, really Mamma, it blew away, Mamma.'
She had not slept in Ethel Olixmannher's room for nothing!

'If you behave like this, you will get yourself talked about all over Swaffham,' said Grandmamma in a pet; 'that disgusting young Plowright, and then Harvey Bloom.'

'I only danced twice with him.'

'The Blooms have no money.'

'So he told me, Mamma.'

'I wonder he could bring himself to mention anything so vulgar. So like him! Pushing yourself forward all the time. I don't know what the young men thought, indeed I don't.'

'No, Mamma.'

That was the beginning of the most unfortunate state of affairs. Missy did not attract beaux and Polly did. Missy made the wildest efforts (in a perfectly delicate manner, of course) but nothing ever happened. She had determined on William Plowright and he was just as determined the other way. The second string to her bow (she had a complete list locked in her little jewel case) was a Mr. George Rattigan, a full-blooded, heavily drinking adonis of thirty-seven, who knew everything there was to know about Swaffham life, and far too much to be entrapped by Missy.

Mr. Rattigan in present-day parlance wasn't having any. He refused all invitations to tea in case after a couple of visits Grandmamma, anxious to pursue her darling's affections, enquired his intentions. Grandmamma was casting a matrimonial eye on every young man, because marriage was supremely important and was a social slur if missed.

Unfortunately although it was so tremendously urgent, the Victorians fostered immense faith in providence, believing that the desirable suitor would drop as manna from Heaven. It would have been exceedingly vulgar, if not downright fast, to go half-way to meet him.

The right lover would appear for Missy, sighed Grand-

mamma, even though she was getting a little perturbed about it, God would provide!

This matrimonial agency supplied by the Almighty was believed to be infallible, but alas, in the case of Missy Gardner, her name was destined to remain on His books for all time.

* * *

Whilst Grandmamma was getting herself interested in the prospects of her daughters (strictly in turn, naturally) she had not been aware that her son was having barmaid affairs, and had developed into a downright masher. He was all for a little freedom with the fillies. He never missed anything good that was going, and as far as Johnny was concerned it was no use to him if it was too good.

He had now got himself involved with a little puss who swept him right off his feet with her bold beauty. Maria was a 'handsome piece' said Johnny. She dressed showily and that had caught his watery but roving eye; in those days it was not the thing to be flashy. One had always to look a lady. One wore genteel clothes of an elegant nature, plain but good was the recipe and so the more on-coming gentlemen never made unfortunate mistakes. There was no make-up. Missy and Polly did a little discreet titivation with red geranium leaves, and the cornflour as powder, but nothing more! Powder if you had bought it would have been considered rather *demi-monde*. However the old burnt match supplied adequate mascara, but had to be applied with skill so that Grandmamma discovered nothing. Everything must be done surreptitiously, so that nobody ever suspected that it was not entirely natural. It would have been shocking to have been discovered. All this care had to be taken, despite the fact that on their birthdays Grandmamma had given each girl a ghastly thing called a 'trinket set', consisting of china tray, ring-stand (they had no rings), two small rouge pots (unthinkable) and a larger one for powder (they had no

powder). No nice person could have been without a trinket set, it was the thing to have, but none save a Jezebel could have used it

Maria was a bit of a Jezebel! She liked to look smart, and she did look smart, much too smart. That was her trouble.

Johnny met her at a gymkhana where he raced and won on a penny farthing bicycle he had borrowed from the Plowright boys. He looked adorable in a neat brown bowler with side whiskers, tight trousers with no central crease, and a closely-buttoned lapel. Maria languishing over the winning tape looked at him. Johnny took off his bowler and gallantly saluted her as he won. Always a master of finesse, was Johnny!

The affair went on *sub rosa* for a little time and although all Swaffham (and the girls) knew about it, Grandmamma didn't, which was the thing that mattered. Nobody thought that marriage was Johnny's idea, he had made enough fun of other poor lambs who had gone willingly to the slaughter; they all thought it was one of his passing affairs, but Maria had other ideas.

Johnny proposed. He was immediately accepted. In marrying him, Maria felt that she would 'go up one in the world', the aim and object of every girl in those times. If you could go up two so much the better, and although they quite frequently came the most horrible purlers in the process this never seemed to deter the socially ambitious.

Johnny, with his sideboard full of silver cups, his fen skating championship, a masher in all senses of the word and a most gay conversationalist, was something of a hero in the world of Swaffham girlhood. Maria also believed that he was very well off. How could she think otherwise?

Grandmamma had believed herself to be comfortably secure. She had lived in a lavish manner, she had educated her children ahead of their time. Her daughters were 'young ladies', a title not then applied to every little shop girl but only adopted by well-educated and well-mannered young

women. It looked as if Grandmamma's only son had comfort behind him. So far his Mamma had always been there to see him through, and how she had seen him through! Even Johnny could testify to that.

Maria felt that she was taking a leap into prosperity. Johnny had given a most glowing account of his prospects to his prospective father-in-law, who was left beautifully fuddled, and had no idea from what actual source Johnny's dividends came. Then he had to tell his Mamma.

That wasn't so easy.

He told his sisters first, and Missy wept. She thought it too awful that her brother should be entangled with that flashy-looking girl. Polly thought he would have the most shocking row with Mamma. 'You'd better be careful,' she said.

'You'll have to help me.'

'Well, I certainly shan't,' said she, with some spirit; 'it's your wedding, not mine.'

'You'll both of you die old maids,' declared Johnny, 'and serve you right.'

Then he went down to tell Grandmamma.

At first she declared that nothing would make her countenance such a wedding, until Johnny reminded her of the pie into which both of their fingers had been poked. It took all the hot gin in the house to get her over that argument, and a lot more after she had gone through the awful afternoon when she 'saw Maria'.

Everything was brought for that, best china, best napery, best dresses. It was a most difficult moment with Grandmamma itching to be rude but too afraid of Johnny to let fly. Maria was both nervous and worried, poor girl! Missy and Polly sat there dumbly behaving like perfect young ladies, whilst Mr. Brown had the wisdom to go out for a walk and stay out till the coast was clear again. It was a great strain, and nobody was natural, for Maria was overdressed in black with a red bonnet and a lot of red poppies

pinned to the bosom, and more on her umbrella handle, so that as Polly wrote in her journal, 'we nearly died of shame'.

After the betrothed couple had left Grandmamma had hysterics, and had to be given hot brandy to bring her round, after which she had a violent attack of nose-bleeding, and they thought that they would have to send for Dr. Love to bring his leeches. However, recovering from that she had a good row with the girls, and a worse one with Mr. Brown when he came home from his drawn-out walk.

Of course really Grandmamma was in a fix. There was the money question, where was it all coming from? Johnny had made it quite plain that he expected his Mamma to help him. Mamma was not in the position to do much. Things were getting worse and worse. Maria wanted to have a big wedding and cut a dash; nobody else wanted it to be a big wedding, but nothing would stop it. Bustles were coming into fashion, and you could be sure that Maria's bustle would be one bit bigger than anybody else's. The girls were to be bridesmaids.

'I won't be,' said Missy.

'You'll have to be, so there! I won't have people talking,' said her Mamma.

'I'll be ill,' said Missy.

'I shall kiss the bridesmaids but never the bride,' said Wally Plowright who had dropped in on this row.

'Oh, do go home, Wally, and stay at home,' said Grandmamma.

A house was eventually found in Swaffham and taken and furnished for Johnny. A good deal of money was drawn out of somebody's banking account (presumably not his own) and it was arranged and paid for. A good servant was engaged, Grandmamma saw to that, and although having only one servant was a very common thing to do, she felt that they could not hope to keep two.

As the wedding-day approached the girls noticed that her temper was becoming more and more touchy. On the morning of the day itself she woke up in one of her very worst moods, and she had a fierce row at breakfast because Mr. Brown would not get up an argument with her. Mr. Brown had always maintained that the aristocrat did not row; he was above bickering, he maintained a haughty silence. At first Grandmamma had thought that was most classy, now she found it merely maddening! Besides it was not a dignified haughtiness, it was the sulks. A sulky opponent is merely a target for a virago, and Grandmamma had discovered this. Every morning these frightful breakfasts had to be gone through. Prayers' over (profound family prayers for peace), Grandmamma would preside over the crocheted tea-cosy and let fly at Mr. Brown over bacon and eggs. On either side the miserable girls sat. There was nothing they could do, nothing that anybody could do.

Mistaken Mr. Brown had stated that he wished to attend Johnny Gardner's wedding in a most genteel pair of shepherd's plaid trousers that he had by him, and Grandmamma wanted him to wear his fawn face cloths which looked like Prince Albert and were much more captivating. The girls tried in vain to pretend that nothing was really amiss; when the row was at its sordid height, the door opened, and to-day's bridegroom popped a jaundiced face round the door.

Johnny had been out with the local lads the night before on a last bachelor 'bust', for in this, fashion has never changed its trend. It was a raven party—never more! The Plowright boys, Atty Palmer and a few others had kept him going into the wee sma' hours, and this morning everybody was feeling the effect. Here was dear Johnny with a throat like an oven, and a head that split in two every time he tried to think. Johnny had crawled down because he wanted dear Mr. Brown to fetch him something out of the convenient chemist's shop to put matters right. Mr. Brown demurred.

The truth was that the man was such a fool he didn't know what to fetch, and most unfortunately for everybody, Grandmamma twigged this.

Row number one had been face cloth as against shepherd's plaid trouserings. Row number two was on the subject of morning-after-the-night-before pills!

'I shall die,' said Missy, when she went upstairs to help make the beds.

'It is dreadful. I do wish Mamma would not work herself up this way, it does no good.'

'Why can't Mr. Brown wear whatever trousers he likes?'

'I can't think.'

Giant preparations were being carried out. Weddings of the period were held in the late morning to be followed by a square meal and no stinting the food. There was no rot with fiddling sandwiches and little iced cakes; this was to be a proper blow-out! Cold chicken and duck, ham, trifles, tipsy cake, with all the right wines to follow. Grandmamma had got herself so worked-up that she had to get at the hot gin, and then was frightened that somebody would smell it in church, so sprayed herself vigorously with eau-de-Cologne, just in case.

Wally as an usher behaved comically. Nobody had ever thought that Johnny would marry—much too fly, his friends all said—but things happen when young gentlemen fall in love. At the reception toasts were drunk with fervour, Wally kissed all the wrong people, whilst Willy behaved quite beautifully, always the little gentleman, and the loving couple were waved away to the seaside, which was considered to be the only place where a honeymoon could be conducted with decorum, whilst Grandmamma sat back resigning herself to the fact that the first bird had flown from the nest.

'It will be dear little Missy's turn next,' said Grandmamma, waxing romantic as is only right and proper after the first wedding.

But there she counted the unhatched chicken! Men may be silly, they undoubtedly are, but they were never silly enough to want to wed my aunt. She was to be for ever an old maid.

CHAPTER SIX

LOOKING BACK ON THOSE YEARS THAT PRECEDED MY OWN birth, I realize that it must have been certain that on his honeymoon Johnny Gardner got into debt. But before he returned to Swaffham and to his Mamma's generous purse, little Polly had gone on a visit to her friend Mary Leigh at Stockport.

Polly and Mary had not met since the occasion when they waved one another *Auf Wiedersehen* at Bonn. Mary had stayed on for some time after Polly, being the scholastic kind and anxious to learn.

'Mersey Bank' was a large comfortable house of that period when people knew what went to make a large comfortable house, and it stood in several acres of handsome garden in Heaton Mersey. Those were the days when the mills purred vigorously, and the smoke rose from the working chimneys and filled everybody's pockets with money. Large fortunes were being made out of little reels of cotton, for times were prosperous, and Mr. Leigh had done very well for himself. The house was different from Polly's home at Swaffham; it was white and spreading, and the view from the terrace looked across a smoky valley to Alderley Edge. The conservatory—then in the heyday of its fame—was a riot of plumbago and spiraea. Padbury the coachman met Polly at Stockport station and drove the girls home together, sitting in the victoria, with a dust wrap of checked cotton over their knees, and everything being done in the best possible style.

Of course what had really happened was that when my Grandmamma educated her daughters as she had done, she had unwittingly dealt them a very bad turn. They knew

better people than the ones who consented to know them in Swaffham; their ideas had outstripped their environment. Whilst other young women were content with Sidney Smith's music, they were educated up to Beethoven and Bach. They could not go about like their contemporaries singing sickly sentimental songs of gentlemen dying for them on the battlefield, they knew something better. For none of the Victorian songs had trespassed into the *Wilhelmstrasse*, where the Fräuleins had stuck rigorously to the classics.

Polly had been taught Schubert, and Swaffham had no ear for Schubert. Bewildered and upset by it all, Polly could not find her feet. Life was too contradictory for her.

Now staying with the Leighs was a very different story, and much more as she wished. Kate Leigh liked gaiety, Mary had altered very little but her eyes still troubled her, as, alas, they were destined to do all her life; the youngest sister was delicate. They had arranged a series of pleasant parties to entertain their guests and it was all so utterly delightful that Polly dreaded the day when she would have to turn back to that deadly dull Swaffham.

One of the faithful visitors at the house was a certain Mr. Jefferys about ten years her senior, and a man also in cotton. Mr. Jefferys had been very fortunate in that his father had died, and had left him the mills, so that he was extremely well off. From scraps of bedroom conversation let drop by the girls at night, Polly gathered that he was considered to be a suitable *parti* for one of the Leigh girls. She gathered also that if he asked for Mary's hand Mary wouldn't be saying no.

In those days of course it was quite enough to have three unmarried girls in the house to be sure that every eligible bachelor for miles round had been docketed and looked upon 'as suitable. To be married was very important, and parents had a list of starters and non-starters on the ready reckoner system.

Therefore it was devastating for Polly when she found at a dance that Mr. Jefferys was obviously making advances in her direction. In those days the mildest compliment seems to have 'meant something', which was complicating. She tried to avoid him, realizing that this would not be at all a suitable thing to have happen, but his attentions became noticeable, and she was distracted that somebody beside herself would see what was afoot. Gentlemen never danced too frequently with one partner, or it was considered that her reputation was endangered and she might be 'talked about'. Nobody got 'talked about' if they could help it. It was a black mark against you! Nobody danced more than twice in one evening with a gentleman unless she had made up her mind that she would say 'yes' if he asked her. If he didn't ask her it was just too bad, but in those days they managed it all much better than we do now, because they DID pop the question. Public opinion was too strong to avoid it.

A gentleman never saw a young lady alone unless about to propose to her. Everybody was always discussing what was honourable and what was not, and you stuck to the rules of the game whatever else you did. Matrimonially-minded mammas tried to coerce young men into awkward positions from which there was no escape save marriage. Intentions were asked! A great deal of rubbish was chatted about preserving the lady's good name. I don't know what a good name was, and am sure that I should have had a very bad one, but it was apparently a most important thing to have by you. Once you lost it you could never hope to get it back again, and could, I gather, only hie you to a nunnery.

In fact every single thing you did when Mum was a girl was restricted and nicely scheduled. She could not even accept presents willy-nilly. A man could only give a girl flowers or gloves, anything else became suggestive! I wouldn't know why. And that awful language of flowers, too, made it a bit tricky, for if you didn't hot it up in the flower dictionary first, you might find yourself being

completely misunderstood, and having done the wrong thing.

Gentlemen did not give chocolates, but then in those days few people ate sweets and men never. It was unmanly! In Bonn everybody had eaten them, but in England there was but the smallest choice. Bull's-eyes, fondants (called creams by the fastidious), toffees, butter-scotch, chocolate and Edinburgh rock. That was about the lot! It was dangerous to eat many sweets, for not only were they reputed to ruin your teeth, but they gave a girl spots, and had the additional disadvantage of corroding the stomach lining, so had to be treated with the gravest suspicion.

It seems to have been a very difficult time in which to live, though there were definite rules to guide you.

Mr. Jefferys sent Polly flowers, which horrified her, because she was terrified that she would hurt Mary's feelings. She was deeply attached to Mary Leigh, and her affection was so strong that she was unlikely to risk damaging it for a silly love affair with a man who did not interest her.

However, of course he had no idea that he wasn't making the best of impressions, and aghast when he found that Polly would be shortly returning home to Swaffham. On the afternoon before she left, she was told that Mr. Jefferys had called and wished to see her in the morning-room.

If she had any idea of what he had come about, she hid it skilfully. She looked like a present-day matron of forty, in her prim bustled frock and her chip straw bonnet. Nobody would have guessed for a moment how young and unsophisticated she was, as she stood there looking at him.

When asked to be seated, Mr. Jefferys said in an embarrassed fashion that he preferred to stand, but hoped that she would sit. Flustered she sat down knowing that something queer would be afoot, and wondering what on earth it was! In those days men didn't just ask you to marry them. There was a lot of leading up to it. He told her that she must have observed the ardour of his manner towards

her during the past week; because he was a blunt Yorkshireman he was coming right to the point and he had arrived here this afternoon to tell her that he loved her. He was making her an honourable proposal of marriage to become his wife. Dismayed, Polly Gardner stared at him quite helplessly. It was not the sort of thing she had anticipated.

'Oh but, no, of course not. I couldn't,' said she.

'But what have you got against me?' he enquired.

She had nothing against him except of course that she couldn't possibly marry out of her turn and let poor Missy down, and that anyway she was too young—very much too young—and she had never thought of marrying anybody, least of all Mr. Jefferys. He did not like the trend the conversation had taken. He started doing the thing that men always do when in a corner, he said that it was her fault and she'd led him on. Polly had not led him on; she was far too shy to lead anybody on, and more particularly so whilst staying away from home when it was important that her manners should be above reproach. She said so.

When Mr. Jefferys left he was in a filthy temper.

Polly Gardner went up to finish her packing and she wasn't feeling quite so good about things. It was horrifying to have received one's first proposal like that, and it had taken her so much by surprise that she had said no before she had had time to consider if she really wanted to say yes. But anyhow it was only right for Missy to marry first and at all costs the etiquette must be preserved. She decided that she would say nothing about it, because if it came out at home that she had had a proposal before anybody had so much as batted an eyelid in Missy's direction the feathers would fly. Grandmamma was not the sort to stand for any nonsense of that kind.

The train journey home gave Polly a little time in which to debate more closely on the subject. She knew that Missy was flattering herself that William Plowright was paying her attention, but Polly knew privately from Wally (who was a

chatterbox) that William was doing nothing of the sort, and was scared stiff that Grandmamma would make a strategic move in his direction and snaffle him by asking his intentions. Apparently if the mamma of the house asked a visiting gent. his intentions towards her daughters in those days, they could only give the one answer. It was too dishonourable to be caught calling and meaning nothing at all, even though that was exactly what you HAD been doing.

It seems to me as the mere grand-daughter of the establishment, that it must have been very easy to get a husband in those days, for all you did was to buttonhole a young man, or rather get your mamma to do it for you, ask his intentions, and then let him have it! What a dangerous time for any man to live, and how did any of them survive unmarried?

I, thought Polly returning, in the train, shall keep very quiet about Mr. Jefferys. Undoubtedly mum's the word.

* * *

She must have been attractive. I don't suppose she knew it because in the house at Swaffham the praises of darling Missy were sung so hourly that she had got used to the fact that she was the ugly duckling. She might have mousy hair and too long a nose, and rather a large mouth, but she had those navy blue eyes of hers, and that narcissus white skin, and that sparkle that nobody could deny.

Wally Plowright spoke to her. He said that he could not offer marriage because he had no money. What exactly he was offering, I wouldn't know! Had it been to-day I should have had a very good idea, but then I never had Polly Gardner's nice little mind, and she was sorry for him. Wally Plowright explained that he was in the position of the young man who would if he could, but he couldn't. So what?

'And,' said Wally, darkly, 'don't you think William is going to marry your Missy, because he isn't. Missy is in for

fourpennyworth of big surprise tied up with blue ribbon. You'll see.'

She did see!

Returning one afternoon from the constitutional insisted upon as being the right thing for the health, she found the house turned completely upside down and the chemist's shop echoing with Missy's screaming hysterics. Even the market-place had got it! Grandmamma, her cap awry, was doing vigorous work with the smelling salts and burnt feathers—always kept handy for this particular emergency which was part and parcel of Victorian life—and begging somebody to do something about it. Miss Magee was getting down to it, and on the fringe of the party Mr. Brown hovered, wondering what to do, and whether somebody ought not to be dispatched to fetch Dr. Love to bleed Missy.

'What has happened?' quavered Polly.

Missy had been jilted!

'WHAT?' gasped her sister.

'It's disgraceful!' Grandmamma was getting herself all worked-up, her nose reddening and her eye like the foraging eye of a kestrel from right to left. 'Abominable. What are men coming to, and he calls himself a gentleman! I never heard such a thing, I wonder his family dare be seen out in the street.'

What had happened seemed to be really rather innocuous. William Plowright had become engaged to an eligible young woman from Cromer; this had been formally announced and made known in the market-place. It was just what his gay brother Wally had foreseen. ('Well, you don't suppose he kept nipping off to Cromer for the fishing, do you?' was Wally's argument.)

Missy was laid out flat by it. Her argument was that he had deceived her. I don't know how! Apparently from the moment you left school, until you entered the church to espouse the amiable husband chosen by Mamma for you, you focused entirely on marriage. Every man who came

more than three times to the house was suspect; he was even more than suspect, he was quarry! She had made sure that William meant something because he had borrowed books, and had come to tea on Sundays, and had even appeared to like Mr. Brown, which was a strong sign which way the wind blew. Now, she declared, her faith in men had been undermined, and she was sick of their cruel and heartless ways.

She made the most of it, for she cried herself sick, and had to stay in bed. Grandmamma was agitated from one fury to another. She drank hot gin. She railed at Mr. Brown that he ought to have done something about it. She was annoyed with Polly for having gone to stay with Mary Leigh and so have missed most of the incriminating evidence amassing against 'that wretched William Plowright'. He ought to be tarred and feathered! He ought to be hounded out of the town! Oh, that I have lived to see this and from an ironmonger, gasped Grandmamma in indignation. She was always very speedy to accuse other people of being tradesmen, though what she thought she herself was, goodness only knows!

That was Grandmamma all over.

Through the storminess of this really sultry night, Polly came to a conclusion. She was actively-minded, she did not like this life of indolence in the big house behind the shop. She wanted to do more than arrange the flowers, and dust the drawing-room, tat, and cope with Grandmamma in a fury, and Missy in hysterics. After all one had but a single life, one ought to make something of it.

It happened to be the epoch when careers were looked upon with considerable disfavour. It is true that Miss Florence Nightingale had been the shining example, but even in 1880 when Polly was twenty, nobody thought that it was really very proper to earn your living if you happened to have been born a female.

She itched to be up and doing something, but what could

she do, because scope was so limited? Very few professions were open to a woman. The choice lay between governessing, or lady-companioning, and both were much of a muchness. In either case it was an on-the-staircase existence, with no real foothold in drawing-room or kitchen and heartily disliked by both. She wondered if her music and her languages would help at all. She had availed herself of the education offered at Bonn, and she wondered if this might not turn out to be something of a stock in trade.

But oh, the scenes it would entail with Grandmamma! What a row there'd be! She didn't know that she could bear that, as she turned it over in her own mind.

Some months of life being lived like a young lady of the period in Saffham had warned her what to expect of the future. The days were divided between the gentle constitutional ('Don't hurry girls, or you'll get flushed, and being flushed is so common'); sitting at home doing endless *broderie anglaise* on calico, and tatting; reading aloud; struggling with the acrostics in Pawsey's pocket book—the answers were published next Christmas which seemed to be a long time to wait. The whole thing was fairly ineffectual.

Whenever she helped in the house, she got into trouble. Grandmamma was one of those people who liked to go about saying that she was overworked, and what were the younger generation coming to, in that they would never lend her a hand. When somebody came forward to lend the hand, they defeated her ends and she didn't like that because they robbed her of her argument. Whichever way she got it, she was in a fury.

She was also seeing through Mr. Brown and not enjoying that too much. The poor little woman had been born to bitter disillusion. Johnry's marriage was being difficult because Mary, expecting her first baby, had found that he wasn't wealthy really, and cursed the day that she had thrown her bonnet over the windmill for a gent in a bowler hat on a penny-farthing!

Missy had now turned her hopes to Mr. Rattigan. She felt that William Plowright should be socially ostracized for what he had done, but she had now met a new Adonis. Mr. Rattigan was fresh to Swaffham, musically-minded (he sang *Ehren-on-the-Rhine*, and *Dream Faces* at local concerts) and had been very dashing recently at a soirée, volunteering to turn over the pages of the girls' music when they opened proceedings with a duet. In doing this he had touched Missy's hand, and she had read meaning into it.

Yes, most certainly Mr. Rattigan was next on the list! Polly wasn't so sure. She thought Mr. Rattigan was rather dreadful, bull-necked, red-faced, and reputed to drink a good deal. But Missy had brightened up considerably ever since the incident of the duet at the soirée; Mr. Rattigan came to tea, and Grandmamma thought he was most gentlemanly, and fell for his exquisite moustaches which kept getting into the tea-cup and which I should have thought were messy.

Mr. Brown said he thought that Rattigan was a 'good fellow', in fact everything was going along swimmingly. If! Polly wasn't so sure that marriage was the idea. Mr. Rattigan must be thirty-six, a Methuselah, and far too old for Missy, and if he had been going to marry, surely he would have done it before?

But whilst the Swaffham establishment was busily concentrating on the Rattigan romance, she happened to have a little luck in her own field. She was shopping in Gould's shop which was a mecca. There they sold toys, or lent books from the darkest and most inconvenient corner, and she read books continually. Polly was surreptitiously keeping up her studies (though I should doubt if Oryd's library helped so very much in this) and Grandmamma thought it was all nonsense. She kept saying that she picked herself into a frazzle over the home, and all the time her daughter read Schiller and Goethe, and that sort of rubbish!

It is a matter of major interest to me that people like

Grandmamma really did with their time. All those women had innumerable and highly efficient servants. Nobody skimped their work, they daren't! It was considered humiliating if the mistress of the house stooped to do anything like dusting or cleaning, so Grandmamma merely gave orders. It was not like my own position when if I like to waste my breath giving orders I can, but it only means that in the long run (when nobody has listened to me) I shall have to do the infernal job myself! Grandmamma got it done for her. Yet she was worked to a frazzle. And how!

In that house, large though it may have been, there were two daughters, Miss Magee, cook, and a couple of housemaids. How was anybody worked to a frazzle? What did they DO?

I shall never find the answer to this one, because those who could have told me have passed on to another world, where I imagine they are still deluding themselves that they are working hard. But I should like to know the answer.

Polly kept up her studies, Missy didn't. Missy had fallen readily into the tuck-yourself-up-on-the-sofa angle, and was an interesting invalid. Therefore Polly was alone in Gould's and chattering there discovered that only that very day an enquiry had been made by Mrs. Martin of Narborough Hall.

Mrs. Martin was a society woman. Definitely class. Her husband was not strong and she was the elder daughter of one of the ladies-in-waiting, in constant communication with the high-ups at Sandringham. The very high-ups I mean. The family of the Prince of Wales. Grandmamma disapproved of the Prince of Wales, though she thought that the Prince was very pretty. Grandmamma was pro-Victoria.

Mrs. Martin had a young sister living with her, who had returned from abroad when not quite finished, whatever that might mean. Mrs. Martin was seeking a fairly young companion to live at Narborough, to read fluent French and German with her sister, and practise music with her.

'But that would be ideal for me,' gasped Polly, when she heard of it.

She did not go back and discuss this with Grandmamma (who would have been mortified) or Missy (who would have had hysterics). She wrote stating her qualifications and asking for an interview.

I imagine at that particular time Mrs. Martin did not find too many suitable young women who could undertake really expert French and German for her sister, and she sent for Polly. Everything had to be managed *sub rosa*, and here Wally Plowright came in very useful. If ever there was a *sub rosa* young man Wally was it. Polly confided her project to him and he met her in the pony and trap in the Castleacre lane, praying that no one would see them. If they had been seen they could never have hoped to live down the scandal, and anyhow he was supposed to be going round the town delivering goods for his father. Somebody was going to be disappointed, but he considered it was worth a darned good rating to get Polly away from Grandmamma.

'Polly and Wally,' said he as they drove along, 'sounds as if they were made for one another, doesn't it? It's a pity there's no money in it!'

* * *

Narborough Hall was the type of house that Polly had never entered before. It was large with exquisite gardens laid out in a formal pattern as was the mode. There were men servants and opulence was everywhere. Mrs. Martin received her in a small morning-room. She was in the early twenties herself, with a keen sense of humour and was one of those people born before her time, very ~~fit~~ on sport. She didn't get on too well with her sister, and ~~was~~ as irritated to find the girl back on her hands, but ~~pre~~ ^{she} ~~ferred~~ ^{was} to do the best she could by her. She looked at Polly and her first question seemed to have been rather beside the mark. It was, 'Can you ride a sociable?'

'I've never tried,' confessed Polly, 'but I think that I'd love it.'

'Come and have a look at it.'

Mrs. Martin took her out into the stable yard where the brand-new sociable was standing. At that time the bicycle was as yet round the next corner. There had been the velocipede, and the bone-shaker. Wally had come a cropper in the market-place on his father's bone-shaker ('Serve him right,' said public opinion which was very anti-bicycle). Johnny had won a gymkhana on a penny-farthing. Meanwhile the sociable had put in an appearance. It was a rather awkward but definitely formal affair, whereon two riders sat side by side so that they could chat pleasantly—hence the name. It was heavy to work, one just ploughed along good and hard, also it was thought to be most unladylike, but typical of the awful modern girl who would do anything, and anywhere. How a female could be seen out on a thing like that, nobody knew.

However, the moment that Polly Gardner set her eyes on the brand-new sociable standing in the Martins' stable yard, she knew that her luck was in. There was enough of Johnny in her for her to know that she itched to get on to it.

'Let's try it out?' she suggested.

Now she forgot all about Wally waiting down the lane in his father's pony and trap, and how he had implored her not to be long because the purloining of the pony would be discovered, and also the ironware which had not been delivered. She and Mrs. Martin climbed on to the sociable, and off they went up and down the drive, gaining speed and getting extremely flushed. It wasn't Narborough Hall at all, it was the beginning of the new era. It was Heaven.

'Well, of course you must come. What fun we are going to have together,' said Mrs. Martin.

The whole thing was settled then and there, and the salary was a comfortable one. Twenty pounds a year. Munificence.

'A nice time you've been,' said the indignant Wally when

at last the girl appeared back in the lane. 'It's the last time I ever help you out of a hole, and do you a good turn.'

'Oh, but Wally, it's settled. Twenty pounds a year and a sociable!'

'Twenty pounds a year and a sociable? By Jove, what's your Ma going to say to that?' Wally whipped up the horse and they started for home. 'And what do you think my Pa is going to say when he finds Black Bess missing, and all that ironmongery lying about?'

* * *

The next trouble, and it was a major one, came in breaking the news to Grandmamma. This wasn't easy.

Polly tackled her after the tea was finished round the pot fern, and just before my grandparent arranged herself on the sofa under the magenta tricot rug, to sleep off the ham and the potted meats.

Grandmamma was naturally horrified, but she was torn two ways. The Martins were county which was gratifying, and she would like to be able to speak of 'my dear daughter at Narborough Hall', which would give her enviable kudos. Mrs. Martin's mother being a lady-in-waiting was something beyond the wildest dreams. On the other hand it was not pleasant to think that little Polly was being paid for her services there, in fact she was almost a servant, and Grandmamma could not have helped but recall that at different times she had made some of the most scurrilous remarks about companions and governesses, when she wanted to put Eleanor Magee in her place.

On thinking it over, however, she decided that Polly was only a second daughter—definitely inferior—so she could give her sanction. That corner was safely rounded. She could not have believed that it would prove to be so sticky when it actually came to it. However, much worse was to come when she went up to bed with Missy that night.

Missy was in a temper because Mr. Ratigan was being

truculent. Everybody but Missy and my Grandmamma had known this would happen, and now it was happening.

The girls shared a large gaunt room with no fireplace and one window that wouldn't open. There was a lot of patch-work quilt, made by themselves, a mahogany dressing-table with china trinket set and no washing facilities at all!

The funny thing was that Polly had never considered the possibility of Missy making a scene, but Missy had been saving up for it all the evening, and here it was! She was an adept at the vapours and hysterics, and into them she plunged, becoming so ill that in the end Mr. Brown had to get into his trousers again and go round for the doctor. As a chemist, he seems to have been most inefficient in dealing with minor ills in the family. I wonder if Grandmamma thought it odd?

Missy declared that Polly had been cruel to her; it was terrible to think of deserting her devoted sister in this heartless manner, and she could never have believed it possible. She made the most of it.

By the morning Polly, worn out, thought she would throw in her hand. She would have done had it not been that she met Wally who was out early, delivering the stuff he had omitted yesterday.

'Give it up?' said Wally, 'don't be so silly. Stick it out and go to Narborough. Once there, they can't get at you any more.'

It was entirely owing to his timely intervention that she went off on the appointed day.

CHAPTER SEVEN

NARBOROUGH HALL WAS A DELIGHTFUL PLACE IN WHICH to take up residence. Polly's *raison d'être* quickly petered out and it became just a case of practising sociable riding with Mrs. Martin in the grounds.

Just at first they did not venture on to the roads because of public opinion, but that did not last for long. They grew braver. Sport for women was not considered to be in the best of taste, and Mrs. Martin had had considerable difficulty in finding someone to take the other saddle of the sociable and pedal beside her.

She had bought the thing in a fit of enthusiasm, and had had it brought home, only to find it stuck in the stable with no means of getting it into full activity because she lacked a suitable companion. She had thought of subpœnaing a footman, but her husband considered that would be a loss of caste. It couldn't be done. Local young ladies giped, because they believed that the riding of a sociable was immodest, and might give rise to talk (always the difficulty of those times), so that she had found herself at a complete impasse.

Then she had the luck to engage Polly Gardner.

After a while they grew more daring, and of course that was the beginning of the gossips getting at them. They found the rhythmic pedalling round the drive rather boring, and were shaken to bits because the drive was full of pot-holes, and the sociable was fitted with the good old solid tyres. It was before the era of the pneumatic tyre that was to make the activity such a joy. Though just at first the pneumatic tyre had disadvantages, and Polly Gardner told me of a garden-party when everybody arrived on a *cycle à la mode*,

and there were about fifty of the things in the yard. The butler was asked how he would know t'other from which, and explained with a broad grin at his own cleverness, that he had pinned the name of the owner to the front tyre of each!

Now Mrs. Martin and Polly ventured into the Norfolk lanes. Horses reared and shied at them, plunging madly between the shafts and frothing in their dismay at the new contraption. Little did they know that it was good groundwork for getting training in the motor-car so soon to horrify them. Their drivers blasted the new woman who polluted her femininity this way. People called rude remarks after them, imploring them to go home and remember that they WERE women; but they became hardened to all rebuffs because it was such fun, and they turned a deaf ear to all this, pedalling for miles on the sociable and having a marvellous time together.

The great question was whether they dare buy themselves bloomers and equip themselves 'properly' for it. Undoubtedly bloomers would be much more comfortable to cycle in, and facilitate operations, because skirts were a horrible nuisance, but *Punch* had said all sorts of things about bloomers, and everybody was very forthright on the subject. After all, one might surmise they were a'tly named! Polly knew that if Grandmamma ever heard she had gone about in bloomers, she would never dare go to Swaffham again. Mrs. Martin was far more worried that the Princess of Wales would come round the corner and catch her in 'hem; or worse, when she was dismounted and had to cur-la!

'And wi' sort of a fool would I look curtseying in cycling bloe, 'rs?' she asked.

So the idea had to be abandoned but not without some regrets. They spent all their spare time on sport of some sort. Croquet and tennis, and on one occasion they went off and did a three days' tour of the Broads on the sociable, covering

miles, and losing a lot of weight, and wearing themselves out.

For the sociable was heavy going. It was a big four-wheeled article and weighed a lot. Neither of them would admit how much it tired them, for it was their blue-eyed darling and could do no wrong, but getting uphill was very hard work indeed. And of course there were still a lot of humiliating moments to be lived through, when people ran out into the road to stare at them, or, worse, to laugh and pass rude remarks in penetrating voices. Public opinion was still very strong indeed about women going in for this sort of thing. After all, it had only been a recent innovation that a woman drove alone in a hansom-cab, which had at one time been considered quite shocking.

I wish I understood where the argument came in. What harm could happen to you alone in a hansom-cab? Far more harm I should have thought, if with one of the dashing mashers of the period, or do I malign them?

Mr. Martin never said nay to his wife, and was merely amused and sometimes a little appalled at the energy she expended. Grandmamma in Swaffham did not hear too much, because she was still pursuing Mr. Rattigan for Missy, and also Mr. Brown was being a most dreadful trial. He never opened his mouth to speak. Once she had thought this aristocratic and indicative of extreme elegance, but later she had quite accurately surmised it was because the poor man had nothing to say.

Mr. Martin had to lead a very quiet life because he was extremely delicate, so that he kept very much to himself.

Keeping herself to herself was hardly his wife's strong suit; being young and gay she liked fun. Before a very long she and Polly had sent to Howell and James for a couple of shirt blouses, as the first step towards the coveted bloomers which would be so comfortable, and these they wore. They were considered to be unwomanly, just aping men with their shirts, but the proper thing to have. In fact

before long they took the country by storm. Everybody launched themselves into them even at Sandringham.

By this time the younger sister, on whose behalf Polly had been engaged, had become definitely the odd man out of the party. Nobody bothered about her too much.

Polly was finding her background changing, and her world altering at the time when she was most receptive to new conditions. She discovered that better class people were not influenced by the best china and silver. These things were in daily use and therefore nobody lived on thorns like Grandmamma at Swaffham who was simply terrified that she might be caught unprepared, or using the second-best and thought rather common in consequence.

Poor Grandmamma! She lived on edge; she was ever ready to whip off her everyday cap if the door bell rang and substitute her best one, to impress people with the fact that she always wore it. As though it mattered! As though anybody was impressed.

It was all so different from life at Narborough, leaving Polly quite bewildered by the contrast. Very early in her work there, Polly had to be educated up to behaviour in the presence of royalty, which appeared to differ very much from the routine taught by the Fräuleins at Bonn, who 'ad been so influenced by the father of Ethel.

Curtseying was practised in the morning-room. Formal curtseys, court curtseys, bobs. And warning was given of the difficulties that might be expected when their royal shynesses called. The royal shynesses were the Prince of Wales' three daughters, very much alike to look at, and all extremely and helplessly shy. They would arrive at unexpected moments, then stand, but forgetting to ask others to sit. They seemed to be ignorant of the fact that in their presence nobody could sit till asked, or start a conversation until they did. The result of this was that there were some very embarrassing pauses, and that people got tired of standing there waiting to be helped out.

Mrs. Martin had her own way with them, and had come to the conclusion that the only thing to do was to talk to them, royal or not royal, and ask them to sit down as a start to sitting down yourself.

'Now haven't your Highnesses forgotten something?' she would say, 'we can't stand here for the rest of the day, can we?'

Then they would laugh and say yes, and how foolish they were, weren't they? And everybody would sit down and try to make pleasant conversation.

The two boys were a better proposition.

They were interested in the sociable. They were warned that they were on no account to touch it, which wasn't what they wanted at all. Grooms were told not to let them get near it, but there was one awful occasion when it disappeared and the two young lads were seen pedalling down the drive on it. Half-way the thing got out of control, and ran into a tree. Prince George contracted the fiercest bump on the nose which came up like a ripe plum so that they hardly dared to send him home to mother.

'A good thing it wasn't Prince Albert,' said Mrs. Martin, 'after all you can't get your future King into that mess.'

The next time the Princes appeared at Narborough the sociable was put away under lock and key, and they were told that it had been sold. I don't think that Mrs. Martin was so worried about what would happen to them with it, but that it was her most precious possession for the time being, and she did not want it damaged, even by princely hands.

Giving up the sociable they brought their carriers and spent the time cat-chasing.

'They're real boys, that's what they are!' said the grooms.

* * *

Those were to be the happiest days of all Molly Gardner's life, though of course she never knew it. That is one of the

saddest things in life, you never do know when you are living through your finest hour.

There were dinner parties almost every night; they went to balls at Lynn and Norwich, and the only difficulty was to stretch her meagre wardrobe to the occasions. She met everybody who mattered instead of all that Swaffham could afford in the way of very dull society.

But, like a little fool, she missed her big chance when it came. Again that is another trouble in life. If only big chances would arrive labelled as such how much easier it would be. Polly never knew until too late that she had ruined her whole career.

The big chance was a titled gent, with a large estate in the West country, and older than herself. She was the type that seems to have been the old man's darling. Those were the days when money was money and estates were estates. The horrors of income tax and death duties had not eaten away inheritances. The present trend is that tradition is taboo, inheritance unworthy, but as we inherit not only traits and characteristics, but position and possessions from our forebears, surely it is a poor argument?

At that time if a man owned five thousand pounds, he was pointed out in the street as a great man. People said, 'Look at him, he has five thousand pounds!' Five hundred a year was 'very comfortably off'. A thousand a year was a rich man and made him a *parti* to be chased by every mamma in the neighbourhood for their unmarried daughters.

Polly, although she attracted older men, did not care very much for them herself. She found the new visitor very amiable, played tennis with him, and he drove her into Lynn in the phaeton. At the end of a week with proper pomp, which seemed to have been an important part of the proposal of that era, he asked her to marry him. This time, if she had been candid with herself, she would have had to admit that the *beau* could keep her, and in a manner to which she was entirely unaccustomed.

Torn between marrying him and leaving Narborough for ever (Narborough entailing the precious sociable, and Mrs. Martin, to whom she was now deeply attached) she demurred. There was so much against it, she decided. He was thirty-four, and she had promised Missy she would not marry first. She liked him very much, but she was not in love with him. She was desperately in love with life. He appeared rather surprised.

'I'm of course very grateful and honoured,' she said.

'But you can't say no.'

'Oh yes, I can,' said Polly with some spirit, 'I want to stay here.'

'But here you only get a salary. You might have to leave at any time.'

'Oh no, I don't think so.' For hadn't Mrs. Martin sworn loyalty?

'You've got your own life to consider,' he suggested.

'I am considering it,' she replied.

He went away with a flea in his ear, and she thought she'd been rather clever, which is always a mistake. That was where her life took the turning-point.

Mrs. Martin's sister was now considered to be finished, and was to return to London to live with her mother who was now in residence near the palace. Her departure was looked upon with favour at Narborough, because now Polly and Mrs. Martin could spend all their time together with no feelings of guilt about the sister's education. Hitherto there had been times when the sister had been rather a clog on the conscience, now they could do what they wished. Polly would stay on as personal companion to Mrs. Martin.

To celebrate this glorious new phase they started archery, getting everything nicely arranged on one of the lawns. Archery was an approved hobby, and thought to be in the best taste, so much better than the sociable. In fact it was accepted as an entirely chaste sport, giving a pleasant stance, and assumed to be very good for the figure.

Every afternoon they went to the lawn to practise their archery, with a footman standing in a thoroughly dangerous position to salvage spent arrows for them. Before long he sustained an arrow, but being a footman could not make too much fuss. When stooping to retrieve one that had missed its mark, he had supplied far too good a mark for the next one, and had got it!

Mr. Martin was irritated about this, and from that moment archery suffered the death and they contemplated the idea of buying a couple of tricycles, one apiece so that they could race one another down the drive.

The tricycles were all ready to be delivered to Narborough when sudden word came from Swaffham that Missy was very seriously ill with typhoid fever, and that her life was despaired of. Grandmamma was in a ferment, and insisted that Polly must return immediately, which brought her back to earth with a jolt.

Duty called.

Polly was completely horrified to get this bad news. She had been so busily enjoying herself at Narborough that she had not given a second thought to what was going on in dreary old Swaffham. Only now, as she read the telegram—always looked upon with the greatest suspicion as bringing bad news—did she realize how deeply she cared for her sister, and how much she would reproach herself should anything happen. And the telegram said that her life was despaired of. Polly blamed herself for this having happened. She should never have left Missy to face that miserable life alone in Swaffham with Grandmamma. Their home was particularly difficult, as she knew.

‘I shall have to return,’ she told Mrs. Martin.

‘Of course.’

‘Naturally it won’t be for very long.’

‘I’ll send you over in the carriage,’ said Mrs. Martin, and did.

Polly went off in the carriage and pair, with a couple of

men on the box as was right and proper, and she was driven in state to the house in Swaffham where she anticipated finding everything and everybody in complete chaos.

As she drove along she was terrified that she would arrive too late and find the blinds severely drawn, and the mutes standing at the door as they had done when Charlie had died, and 'your poor Papa'. If this happened, she knew that she would never forgive herself. However, it did not happen.

There was Grandmamma reposing on the dining-room sofa under the magenta tricot rug for the usual siesta which seems to have occupied most of her busy day. Mr. Brown was drifting about the shop in much the same dilatorily aristocratic manner as before, his beautiful ginger whiskers brushed and shining. Nothing seemed to be in a very great state of agitation. It was Eleanor Magee who took the bewildered Polly off upstairs and on the landing confided in a whisper something of what was afoot.

'I think,' said Eleanor Magee, 'it is all that wretched Mr. Rattigan's fault. I don't believe that any of this is typhoid fever for a moment, even though the doctor thinks it is, but he is a new man, and doesn't know Missy.'

'But the telegram says she is dying.'

'I dare say, but she isn't,' was the assurance.

Missy was lying in bed looking extremely languid. It was easy to see that she wasn't really very ill. She cried a trifle on seeing her sister, said she did not know how she had lived without her, and anyway she wouldn't live much longer, which perhaps was a good thing, because she was so unhappy. She'd be glad to go, etc. She felt that nobody understood her. Life was so hard.

Before very long the story came out.

Missy had been jilted again. William Plowright had been the first cad, now it was that odious Mr. Rattigan. I don't know how my aunt Missy made out that she was getting herself jilted, seeing that she had never yet been engaged to

anybody, and I have always understood that to be jilted you must kick-off with an engagement ring. Nobody ever sought her hand in marriage. I think in those days young ladies were only too willing to suppose masculine attentions that were in truth non-existent. Hot on the trail of true romance, they went out to meet it, not only half-way but a very good two-thirds of the way.

Mr. Rattigan had been quite polite to Missy Gardner, whom I should think he looked upon as rather a 'poor thing'. It was the successful era of the poor thing! His politeness had proved to be his undoing. All over the country young ladies of fashion were making the mistake of confusing courtesy with something far deeper, and a great many of them got their matrimonial plans upset in consequence. Then they always retired to their rooms with some discreet illness to save their silly faces.

This was exactly what had happened to Missy.

She had been flattering herself that sooner or later Mr. Rattigan was bound to propose to her. She had allied with him the dainty valentine which she had received the last fourteenth of February, a bunch of flowers tied with a fanciful blue ribbon bow, dangling with a very red voluptuous heart and the words 'I LOVE YOU' inscribed upon it. There was an initial too which she read as H. (for Herbert, which was his name). I think it ought to have been W. for Wally, who adored a nice little bit of fun, and had had it at Missy's expense.

She had counted her chickens before they were hatched.

On the strength of the exquisite valentine and the way Mr. Rattigan smiled when he took off his hat to her, and once made a point of stopping and talking, and called twice at my Grandmamma's, Missy had simpered confidential secrets to her friends, and she had said a great deal more about dear Mr. Rattigan than was entirely true. She had enlarged upon the symptoms. Therefore she had suffered the most dreadful lack of prestige when he went to

Hunstanton for a little sea air and got engaged to the daughter of a local doctor who lived there.

What was even worse was the fact that with the loss of William Plowright and Herbert Rattigan, Missy had entirely exhausted her stock. There was nobody left whom she could hope to marry. All the eligibles of Swaffham had been snaffled.

Grandmamma wasn't taking this in an amiable mood; she had never been that kind of woman, and when she heard about it she sent for Mr. Rattigan and received him in the dining-room in her best cap.

'And what have you got to say for yourself?' she demanded, a proper little martinet, her hands folded on her stomach, cap slightly awry.

She had thought there was no answer to that one. But there was, and Mr. Rattigan gave it to her. And to think that I thought he was a gentleman! fumed Grandmamma. However he wasn't afraid of her even if she thought he was.

'How dare you?' she flashed, 'you have no sense of honour, no sense of decency. You play with a young girl's affections. You let her get talked about, then what do you do? You go off and behave like this. You ought to be horse-whipped.'

I can assure you those were no times for an eligible bachelor to live in.

When he departed having been very rude to Grandmamma, and she having been ruder to him, Missy had sat down with the intention of crying herself sick. Crying continuously, and her complete abstinence from food in accordance with the proper prescribed schedule for love-sickness, had produced unfortunate collywobbles. That was naturally far too ordinary and far too rude a complaint to be diagnosed as such, and the doctors knew it. This time it wasn't good old Dr. Love; he had been dismissed because he had been too truthful about Missy, and had dared to diagnose one of Grandmamma's 'spasms' as

being 'wind', which of course could not be tolerated. Anyway Grandmamma had never liked him since he refused to accept her as a social equal and only had his prescriptions dealt with in the shop. So she had gone for a new refined young man, who, wanting to make a good impression and not daring to say what was really the matter, had labelled it with great dignity as being typhoid fever. He must have known that her life was in no danger whatsoever. She was just the typical young woman of the period. She had had a love affair that had gone bad on her, a very trying position to be in as every woman knows, and she had gone to bed in a vile temper with vapours. She was furious because now she knew that she was left high and dry on the shelf and would be labelled old maid!

To be an old maid was the end! Nobody ever supposed you took on the position from choice. Who'd choose it? Much better a downright unhappy marriage, or a really bad husband who beat you, than to be that Jespised creature the old maid.

The moment that Missy was left alone with her sister, she turned and clung to her, the tears pouring down her face.

'You must never leave me again,' she begged, 'it is so dreadful alone here with Mamma, and that awful Mr. Brown! They fight all day, or she fights and he says nothing but just gnaws at his whiskers! Oh Polly, it is so dreadful.'

Polly knew only too well how dreadful it was, but she was thinking of Narborough and the sociable, and the two tricycles that were going to be such fun.

'We are sisters, how could you go back on your own sister?' begged Missy.

After all it was a blood bond. The duty of the younger sister was to stay beside the elder one and not be so cruel. If Polly deserted her again and left her alone here with Grandmamma and her tantrums, Missy swore that she would drink laudanum and have done it. Laudanum was the fashionable poison; all the nobility drank it for a

quick get-away, it struck a sinister though very popular note.

'You mustn't say such things,' said the horrified Polly.

That delighted Missy. She went on saying it. She insisted that her death would rest entirely at Polly's door, because the misery that she had suffered had been entirely Polly's fault through taking that beastly job at Narborough as she had done, and leaving the unfortunate Missy to be miserably unhappy at home. She was a most pathetic sight as she wept and wailed, and she tore poor little Polly's resolutions to ribbons with her trashy sentiment. Sentimental bonds are the strongest in the whole world, and that era knew how to fetter their women with them.

Farther and farther into the background receded the delightful tricycles and dear Mrs. Martin and all that host of attractions for which she had foregone marriage to a baron in the West country. Yet she could not forgo this clinging vine of a sister.

'But——' she begged.

'Then I shall die, I've nothing left to live for, I shall just die,' wailed Missy.

The joys of Narborough were disappearing with vigour into the distance of things past, and Polly realized that it was wrong, if not actually wicked, to taste of such delights when her only sister who was so delicate was so bitterly unhappy. She had been thinking only of herself, and she must pull up her socks.

Late into the night Missy continued beseeching, and of course the result was a foregone conclusion. At supper, Grandmamma and dear Mr. Brown had a one-sided set-to, which started on much the same base.

'How could you be so cruel to your poor sister, and she so loving and so sweet?' from Grandmamma, and then in irritation because dear Mr. Brown said nothing: 'Why don't you sometimes open your mouth and say something?'

In the end there was nothing for it but to give in. Polly

sat down and wrote an unhappy little note to Mrs. Martin, and she told her about her sister's serious illness, emphasizing the fact that it made it impossible for her to return. Because before she really knew where she was Polly had been swept up with the story of the typhoid fever, and now she had come to the stage when she didn't know if she was standing on her head or her heels, and almost believed it. When she posted the letter she felt that sending it had broken her heart, but the thing had to be done. She realized now that she was the person entirely to blame—even though Miss Magee said that she wasn't—and that she ought never to have gone away.

And you may be sure Missy helped her remember it that way.

As soon as she received the letter Mrs. Martin drove over to Swaffham to argue the thing out. Unfortunately she arrived at a bad moment, and was confronted by Mr. Brown who was abashed at being caught in his everyday smoking cap, and a lamentable moment because Polly was out so that she and Mrs. Martin never met. Mrs. Martin was a trifle huffed at her reception; Mr. Brown was always an awkward creature and had received her very coldly by reason of the regrettable cap. In those days lesser fry did not receive the élite coldly; they kotowed. He was not servile enough and she took offence.

They never even told Polly of the visit, for Grandmamma came to the conclusion that Polly must stay here with her sister, and if she knew how eager Mrs. Martin had been to get her back, she would find it unsettling. Grandmamma did not like Mrs. Martin. They had met in the sitting-room, Grandmamma disturbed from her siesta, cap awry, and in that awful condition of only just coming-to. It was many years later that Polly heard of the visit, and then it was Eleanor Magee who let it out.

'I ought to have told you at the time,' she said, 'now of course it is much too late.'

It was very much too late. Polly Gardner's life had been spoilt for her.

A good deal happened in those years before I was born. Life changed very considerably between the moment when the gamp told Grandmamma that it was a girl, and the moment when the nurse told my mother that I was a girl also.

Polly Gardner never managed her life very well, and the result of this arrangement when she left the Martins to be with her dear sister once more, only brought about the one result. Now Polly was the girl who was miserable.

She had thought that she could put Narborough behind her, but there she was wrong. Stories of her activities on sociable drifted back into the narrow little circles of the Swaffham; they were of course exaggerated stories, and nice-minded dowagers told Grandmamma that they thought the whole thing was quite disgraceful. What on earth did the modern young woman think she was doing? In a shirt blouse too? It was a mercy that Polly and Mrs. Martin had not ventured into bloomers, for, as Polly knew, had it not been for the dangerous proximity of the Princess of Wales and the necessity for 'bobbing', they certainly might have done.

The dreadful part was that Grandmamma was a very 'nice' woman and prided herself on this niceness. She was in point of fact so nice that she saw something nasty in almost everything that happened. She thought that the new woman was a shocker, and that getting on to a sociable and showing your legs was utterly disgusting. Not that she ever spoke of them as legs. Legs were a purely masculine possession, a female might not have them, and Grandmamma always spoke of them in an embarrassed manner as being 'feet'.

Now the sociable had never shown anybody's legs at all; it hardly showed your feet, for your skirts were tethered to the shoe with polite pieces of elastic. But, as Polly knew,

there was no point in defending the poor sociable; Grandmamma had got her knife into it and there they were.

The dreadful part was that Polly had returned to the lower middle-class aura, which had become additionally irksome because in the interim she had seen something so much better. She had been educated too well. She did not like anything to do with the lower middle-class, and she wanted something with intelligence. She liked good conversation and there was no hope of her getting anything like that in Swaffham. She admired good taste, good music, and art. None of these was in evidence in the sitting-rooms or bedrooms of my Grandmamma's house. Grandmamma had very little taste and was quite satisfied with the big bulging old furniture, the fern with its red crinkled paper round the pot ('So nice and bright-looking', said she); she liked chenille. Poor little Polly hated and resented the long hours dawdled on the sofas, and the dull conversations always of local people and tittle-tattle and never of places or events.

Worse still, she knew now that she thoroughly detested Mr. Brown. He was for ever getting the wrong side of Grandmamma, and starting a row. She could never make out if he did it on purpose, if he wanted to make it uncomfortable for everybody, or if he were such a fool that he just couldn't help himself, but tottered into a row because he hadn't seen it coming.

'I oughtn't to have come back,' she said one day to Johnny, when he happened to drop into the old home to see how the land lay, and if he could touch his Mamma for something.

'Of course you oughtn't, but you always were a little fool'. Brotherly but hardly comforting.

'How could I have done anything else, I should like to know?'

'How? Why, I'd have left Missy to it. She's only sick because she knows that she is going to be an old maid, and

serve her right. I don't blame Rattigan! I'd have done the same thing. He was well out of it!"

'But Missy is so sweet really.'

'Sweet!' echoed Johnny, and interposed another word, a new one on Polly, who, when she searched for it in the dictionary that had belonged to her papa, could not find it mentioned anywhere.

* * *

Unfortunately Missy made a very tardy recovery. She did not want to get well and be up and about again, and meet other people who might make comments. Her pride had been badly wounded. In those days nothing was worse for any girl than to be jilted. She liked being the centre of the home with Grandmamma fussing about her.

Whilst she lay in her room, she had time to lie back and count her lamentably few opportunities in the matrimonial line; they were depressingly small. She went through all the local eligibles, and could think of no other candidates now that William Plowright and that caddish Mr. Rattigan had cried off.

One thing was certain, she had got to marry. It was tremendously important. It was vital that every girl should be called Mrs. somebody-or-other, with her own home, and a separate ménage. And now she knew that if she did not exert herself, she did not look like getting any of these things. Swaffham was a small town. There was Wally Plowright left, but they both disliked one another so much that she would rather die than say yes to him. There were Atty Palmer, and Gerald Hudson of Castleacre, both non-starters who had never even looked at her; there was young Harvey Bloom who report had it was going into the Church as his father and grandfather had done before him, but he would have laughed at her, and she knew it. The whole bunch were a stuck-up lot, she decided. I suppose until this illness Missy had never even thought of the awful prospect

of being left a spinster, but here it was now, a skeleton staring her between her eyes, and she could not think what she could do to stop it!

The new doctor amiably suggested that the moment she was well enough she should go away for change of air. It was decided that she should go off and stay with her old school-friend, Muriel Walker, who lived in Surbiton, and who was about the only school-friend that Missy had ever made.

Polly, who was secretly fretting a good deal, had developed anæmia and was having continuous faints.

'It's the tight-lacing,' said Grandmamma, who secretly was very proud that her girls were only eighteen inches in the waist, and would not have allowed them to 'let-out' in case they came into competition with some of their less illustrious neighbours. Eighteen inches was the thing to be, and eighteen inches the girls were, and however much nagging was entailed, as far as Grandmamma was concerned, eighteen inches was what they had got to be!

Together they went to stay with the Walkers.

Missy and Polly went up to London early intending to spend the morning doing a little shopping. They would buy new bonnets and a cape each; Polly hoped to get a bit of bear, then the most fashionable fur to wear as a tip-top. Grandmamma had thought they would be perfectly safe as long as they stayed together, and it was possibly the first time in their lives that they had got away without a chaperone.

It was the greatest fun, but as the morning progressed unfortunately things came to an impasse.

Things in London were very difficult for women of that period. No nice girl ever went into a restaurant to have a meal unless she was discreetly chaperoned or with a protective male. To have gone in alone would have indicated that they were there for the asking and they would most certainly have been asked by some undesirable man or

other. A decent restaurant would have refused them admittance, knowing this. They could only buy a bun each and eat it in the horse 'bus, in itself a rather vulgar proceeding.

Both felt that it was a trifle immodest to be riding like this in a horse 'bus with no older woman accompanying them, but about it there was that *soupçon* of excitement. That was until things got a little trying. And they got very trying! Nature overcame them.

At that time there were no public lavatories save at the stations, and it was considered undesirable to go to such places, because, as my Grandmamma so naïvely put it, 'everybody would know why you went there', which was awkward.

The girls were shopping in Oxford Street when they realized how very very trying it was becoming, and this is one of those dilemmas in which every moment the need becomes more pressing. Restaurants and shops provided nothing in the shape of a ladies' room, it just wasn't done. It was considered to be the sort of thing that no nice woman ever did. Gentlemen? Oh yes, naturally, but then gentlemen of that era had got the world much better trained than had women, who, on a par with the angels, were erroneously supposed to be immune from such vulgar desires. It was a man's world without a doubt; they were allowed all sorts of licence, but on this occasion there was nowhere to be seen offering that comforting sign LADIES, for two damsels in distress.

The situation becoming desperate indeed they finally confided their anguish to a kindly shop assistant in Howell James'. They asked if she could possibly help them. Turning very red she told them that the firm—being polite—had the strictest rules. She had been asked the same question before by similarly distressed customers, and although herself willing to do anything that she could to assist, she had got into serious trouble in consequence of that willingness.

There was such a place in the building, but it was there

only for the use of women shop assistants, and the customers could not possibly be allowed to go there. The assistant would be dismissed. The firm would have a fit.

No, said she.

It had now become obvious even to the shop assistant that the two girls could not possibly travel down to the Walker establishment at Surbiton without finding some port of call of this elusive nature, and fairly quickly. They begged her to be more helpful. Still very red, she went away with noticeable reluctance to enquire of some bigger power as to what could be done for them. Finally and with much trepidation and of course the greatest secrecy lest a shop-walker should see them and enquire what they were after, the girls were escorted into a back yard surrounded with high packing-cases, and somebody's bedroom was robbed on their behalf!

The whole performance which is so laughable now, was a sign of the modesty-gone-to-madness of those times. Women had to be angels from all angles, however naturally unfitted for it. Anything of this disgusting kind was so rigorously taboo that even if it was completely natural it had to be ridden over rough-shod, and treated as though it couldn't possibly be.

They thanked the assistant very much, hoped she would not get into serious trouble—but suspected that she might—and then left. It was, my Mother told me years later, one of the most humiliating experiences of her life.

After staying at Narborough where everything had been so pleasant, Polly thought that Surbiton was very ordinary. Missy, who knew nothing better, adored it, and spent the time simpering and giggling in girlish fashion with Muriel. They had wonderful secrets and enjoyed it all very much. Muriel was a good deal younger than Missy, and was passing through the silly stage only to be expected in the late mid-teens.

The house was a large suburban one with handsome

portico, and a great show of turrets and battlements, of bow windows and high front steps. It was furnished in the fashion of the day, over heavily, with far too many tasselled curtains and china ornaments, and Polly thought it quite hideous. But Missy loved it.

Mr. Walker was extremely kind and he took the girls out and about a bit. The Crystal Palace. To an exhibition. To St. Paul's Cathedral and up the Monument (the last place I could ever wish to go to, to the top, I mean), and they declared that the view was delightful, and well worth the journey up, though I doubt if old Mr. Walker supported this.

They went to the theatre to see Gilbert and Sullivan, then all the rage, so that everybody sang their songs and played the tunes on the piano at home—all properly appointed homes had a piano—and the barrel organs—called hurdy-gurdies—ground out the music all the time.

They dined in London restaurants, and it should have been the most enjoyable fortnight, for Missy was rapidly becoming a new girl, but Polly felt the whole time that there was a steady undercurrent flowing through the house. Something she did not understand, and she knew that it centred round Missy.

Missy had changed.

She was hanging round Muriel in a most devoted manner, to the exclusion of her hitherto beloved younger sister; she was making herself useful in the most un-Missyish way, for Missy hated domestic odd jobs; she wasn't good at the chores, and detested doing anything if she could possibly sit still with her hands in her lap. But here she was for ever volunteering to darn stockings and sew on tapes and buttons. She pressed Muriel's collars; she was rapidly developing into the handiest little woman, professing an almost alarming willingness to do this and that.

The peculiar part was that all these tasks were the kind that Missy would have refused to perform at home, saying that she didn't know how! She would have thought them both

derogatory and demeaning, and Polly could not understand what had happened to make her change in such an extraordinary way.

One night when they were in bed in the Walker spare room, she tackled Missy on the subject. 'What's happened to you? Why do you fuss round Muriel all the time, when you know you hate sewing?'

'I like being useful.'

'Well, you never did before! You always said that you detested darning, and loathed the feel of a needle in your hand. As to ironing collars, you've always made me press yours, yet here you are pressing Muriel's. Why?'

Missy said nothing at all.

'I just don't know why you are doing it,' harped Polly for at the back of her mind she was troubled. She did not like sudden changes. She couldn't understand it.

'You're imagining it,' was all the response she could get, 'the Walkers have been very good to me, and I'm not like you. I like to return good with good.'

There was no answer to that. Polly knew that she would not be sorry to leave Surbiton; as far as she was concerned the visit was not a success; the feeling of distrust grew in her. She wanted to get back to Swaffham.

However, they stayed for the fortnight.

In those days nobody ever packed to go away from home and expended all that energy on a single visit; the thing to do was a round of visits. That was *la mode*.

The Gardner girls finished the first fourteen days at Surbiton, and then went from London to stay with the Hargreaves who lived at Lowestoft. They were a couple of chaste sisters, who had known the family most of their lives, and the elder was engaged to a very low-church curate, with a very heavy cavalry moustache and a little saucer hat that had gone green on top. He was an ever-present damper on any tendency to gaiety, believing cards to be the devil's playthings, and dancing something a good deal ruder.

The week at Lowestoft was not a wild success, possibly because of the curate, and they went on for a fortnight with a distant cousin, Emily Gamble, who lived in the northern part of the county.

Emily had been a bright and excitable girl rather like Polly Gardner in nature, and she had married a man of a very serious type who was considerably older than herself. She had two little boys. Now Mr. Gamble was the full-blooded true to type Victorian father and husband, and he ruled his house with a rod of iron thoroughly enjoying every moment of it. Nobody had disputed his rule, nobody ever would.

At first the marriage had threatened to be unhappy, even in an era when nobody admitted to an unhappy marriage. My Grandmamma had attributed this to the fact that living in the big house with them was his mother. Old Mrs. Gamble was of Spanish origin, a bit of a termagant (not unlike Grandmamma herself) to whom the rod of iron seldom came amiss.

But soon after the birth of the first little boy, old Mrs. Gamble died at a regrettably old age.

The girls arrived at the rambling old house which stood in a prettily countrified garden. They were given a couple of adjoining bedrooms in a wing which had been entirely dedicated to the use of old Mrs. Gamble whilst she was still with them. The rooms had been recently renovated and done up, and were now hung with moss-rosebud patterned curtains, and wallpapers, and spot muslin frilling for the dressing-tables tied with roguish rose-pink bows. The bow was coming into its own, one popped them on to everything, and not always with discrimination.

The wing faced due south, and there was a charming view of the cedars on the lawn and the wooded hills which rose behind the valley.

‘We shall be happy here,’ said Polly.

Neither of the girls liked Mr. Gamble, who was a grim

nan, one of those detestable creatures with a perennial smile on his face. They knew that Emily was afraid of him. She was, however, devoted to Johnny and Charlie, her two little boys.

'But it's so dull living here in the country after life in Norwich,' she told the girls.

She was delighted to have them staying with her, and particularly fond of Polly. They spent the time playing duets together, getting a new score of *The Sorcerer* and singing all the songs. Missy found herself a trifle out of it, but did not fret, for she spent most of her time writing letters in the morning-room to Muriel. It seemed very queer that suddenly she should have developed this violent affection for a girl much younger than herself, and what she could find to tell Muriel in these over-frequent letters puzzled her sister.

Then an extraordinary thing happened!

During the first week that they spent there, Missy came into Polly's bedroom one evening and said that she detested sleeping alone and the house gave her the creeps. There was nothing in the least creepy about the rooms, which were so fresh and new-looking. Polly thought that it was rather silly of Missy, but then Missy was like that. She did have silly moments. So they decided to share the big double bed in the one room. The bed reached from the wall to the window and beside it was a freshly painted cupboard that had been built in a niche in the wall.

Every morning that Polly awakened the first thing that she noticed was that the door of the cupboard was open, even though she was quite sure that she had closed it the night before.

She mentioned this to Missy.

'It terrifies me,' paricked Missy and she certainly did appear to be very frightened about it.

'It's just the lock doesn't fit,' said the practical Polly, 'i wouldn't worry about it. I'll put a chair against it and that'll stop it, you'll see.'

But although she did put a chair against it and made sure that the cupboard was shut when she went to sleep, the next morning it had been gently pushed aside and there was the door, left ajar as it had been all the other mornings of their visit.

'That AWFUL door,' said the shivering Missy, 'it really is something odd! It is an AWFUL door.'

Both girls were afraid but it all seemed to be rather silly, and they tried to forget it. They did not mention it to Emily Gamble, in case they alarmed her which they did not want to do. It wouldn't be fair to frighten her, for she had to live in the house; they didn't.

All day they tried to find some explanation for the chair having been pushed aside and the door opening on its own in that very odd manner, and finally they decided that the only possible conclusion was that there was some jar in another part of the house that did it. Possibly a door elsewhere was being over-vigorously shut, and it shook this one open?

But they did feel uneasy and would not admit the extent of their uneasiness to one another.

The following evening Polly stayed awake.

She did not do this intentionally for she did not want to spy out the land, being much too frightened. She was in fact so frightened that she simply could not go to sleep.

As she lay there in the half-light—they had invested in a colza oil float from the village shop so as to keep the room dimly lit—she saw the firmly shut cupboard door slowly opening, and the chair silently being pushed aside. For a moment she did not feel actual fear, so much as acute curiosity, for out of the cupboard there stepped a little old woman very short and stout, and wearing a cap like a cheese-mat set well back on her over-broad centre parting.

Polly saw her quite distinctly; she was just an ordinary busy little woman intent on getting from one place to another, and obviously going to cross the room.

Suddenly Missy's terrified voice beside her exclaimed, 'Oh, there's that awful old woman again!' and Missy shot straight down the bed under the clothes so that she shouldn't see any more.

In horror they agitated for a moment hardly knowing what they did, and when they recovered the old woman seemed to have completely disappeared, leaving the cupboard door open behind her, and the chair pushed aside in the familiar manner of the morning.

It is very seldom that two people see an apparition at one and the same moment, and the two girls were completely shattered by the experience. They sat up all night. Both of them knew that nobody answering to the description of the little old woman was living in the house at that time. Polly was convinced that it must be the ghost of old Mrs. Gamble! Missy did not think so. They had always understood that Mrs. Gamble was very tall and slender, rather a majestic person and very dignified-looking. Nobody could have called the stout little old lady with the cheese-mat on her over-broad centre parting, dignified.

Only one point was quite clear. First thing next morning they must telegraph Grandmamma asking her to wire for their immediate return to Swaffham. They knew, of course, that the attempt to explain their reason for their extraordinary conduct would be difficult, if not impossible, and that when she knew about it Grandmamma would be intensely angry with them, but anything would be better than staying in this room for another dreadful night. That they dare not do.

Next morning at breakfast Polly had a talk with Anne Buckle who had been housekeeper in the Gamble menage for some years. Polly was always the inquisitive member of the family. She asked her what old Mrs. Gamble had looked like, and to her amazement was told that she had been small and given to stoutness, also she always wore a cheese-mat cap.

Even more strange was the fact that in her lifetime there had been a communicating door in that niche between the two bedrooms; she had used one room for the day and the other, the one the girls were sharing, for the night. When she died the door had been bricked up and the carpenter had put a cupboard there to hide the mark he had left behind.

The next thing that Polly did was to wire from the little telegraph office to her mamma.

* * *

The two Misses Gardner were more than relieved to return to Swaffham on receipt of an urgent telegram from their Mamma desiring their immediate presence back in the home. They had been petrified that they might not make good their escape before another nightfall, and they both felt that they could not have lived through a second experience of that nature.

However, Grandmamma receiving their appeal for help, dispatched required help.

At Swaffham Grandmamma sat in the dining-room in a cold fury wanting to know why her girls should have telegraphed to demand such an extraordinary thing of her. The difficulty of explaining something normal to her when in one of her moods, was big enough; but to explain that they had seen a ghost was something that horrified them.

Matters were additionally complicated by the arrival of Johnny, just as they were in the midst of telling the very awkward truth. He thought it was just damned funny! Grandmamma listened going redder and redder; then she said that it was something they had eaten for supper, they had woken up in a nightmare and would not admit it, which was very wrong of them. Thank God, she had never been frightened by any nonsense like that! Ghost indeed, said Grandmamma, she'd like to meet the ghost who would bother her.

'I wish you had seen old Mrs. Gamble, Mamma,' said Polly quietly.

'As if I could!' said Grandmamma, 'I should have chased her round with the poker, and that's what you ought to have done. I never heard such a story and then getting me to telegraph for you too. Whatever is the modern girl coming to? She'll be afraid of her own shadow next!'

They gave up all thought of getting a hearing.

When all was said they were so glad to be back home again that they really didn't mind being laughed at. For the rest of her life my Mother was afraid of sleeping in a bed with a wooden wardrobe alongside it. She always said that it gave her the creeps because she did nothing but think of old Mrs. Gamble.

* * *

As the time passed however, there was still something very odd about Missy's behaviour, something that worried Polly and which she could not understand. It was almost as though an unseen barrier had sprung up between them; without actually changing, there was a very noticeable difference in Missy.

What Polly did not know was that, whilst staying with the Walkers, Missy had set afoot some new plans for her own future, and she was keeping uncommonly quiet about them. In spite of being such a fool, she was an artful enough little puss when it came to knowing which side of the saucer of milk had the cream on it. She had always posed as being the pathetic and complaining invalid, and recently she had suffered no typhoid fever but just the honest-to-goodness jitters that she was on the shelf. She saw a way off the shelf—or thought she did! It would be ghastly to be doomed to live as the spinster daughter in the house of Grandmamma's wrath for ever. In Surbiton young men came to the house. There were far more eligibles in Surbiton than in Swaffham. Undoubtedly Surbiton was the place so she had got busy with a little private planning on her own account, and not a word did she say of what she had done, even to her sister.

Missy had suddenly abandoned the self-appointed rôle of the Victorian horror, known generally as 'the poor thing'. She had bestirred herself to be very helpful to Muriel. Polly was never a suspicious girl and she loved Missy, so that she was blind to a lot of things that went on, but she was surprised at the sudden ardour for sewing on buttons and tapes, for doing this and that. Though of course it had all been eclipsed by the ghost! Polly was intrigued with the occult—dismissed as being witchcraft in those days—and she kept on thinking about it.

Further events crowded in. Surprising events. Grand-mamma had suddenly made an immense resolution. She would sell the business. Whether her idea was to get rid of it before it got rid of her, history does not relate. Whether Johnny needed reimbursement on a major scale, I wouldn't know. But she said that to possess a chemist's shop was a social clog, and very bad for dear Mr. Brown who knew something better—though what, I wouldn't know—and therefore it was to be abandoned! She was going right away from Swaffham. She was sick of the sight of the place. It had never accepted her as it should have done (was she not the remote cousin by marriage of the Earl of Mar and Kellie—or not?) and she was finished with it.

An offer was made for the business, and accepted.

Polly thought that Johnny must have had something to do with it, for he had that look in his eye which indicated that his fingers had once more gone into the pie, from which he had managed to pull out yet another fat plum. But it all seemed to have happened rather suddenly. Missy did not seem to be distressed about it. One would have thought that Missy would have thrown a thousand fits, but she did nothing of the sort. Perhaps she was glad to think that this would provide the escape from meeting William Plowright and Herbert Rattigan, and therefore be fortunate.

As the subject of money and sales was very much in the air, Polly plucked up her courage to enquire about 'Papa's

money' and what was happening to the share for the two daughters. The thousand apiece to await their majority with accumulating interest? Surely it was time that something happened about this?

Grandmamma had to do some quick thinking, and hurriedly, state that the conditions of Papa's will were that the little dears came of age at twenty-five. So right of your dear Papa, so thoughtful! Dear Papa knew what fortune hunters were like, and how foolish young girls could be. Meanwhile she would increase their pin-money if that suited them? Fifteen pounds a year each, would that be a help?

Really the pin-money was hush money, but she kept pretty quiet on that! The trouble had been that she had to do something to quieten them, for Grandmamma, thoughtless, unwitting, and never really intending to do anything wrong, had been led deeper and deeper into the quagmire of financial undoing, and was now seeing something uncommonly like the rocks ahead.

Although she practised rigorous economies, she was really an extravagant woman. Her first husband had been clever in managing money and had always been able to get her out of any difficulties she got herself into. Mr Brown knew nothing of money. It wasn't aristocratic to speak of finances. He never did. Mr. Brown was merely a drag and poor Grandmamma was finding this out.

At different times in her life, when she was in funds, Grandmamma had invested a little in property just as and when she thought she would. She owned some houses in a select quarter of London, at least she called it select, it was at that time becoming rather seedy. It was Clapham, and really not the best part of Clapham, though very modern. A couple of red brick villas in a row, with bow windows upstairs and down, and indoor san. but no bath. Baths were not general. People still did not wash too frequently believing it to be dangerous.

She had a couple of houses in the little country town of Hertford, and some dotted about Norwich. Thinking it over, she decided that the moment the transactions with regard to the shop and house were through, she would uproot herself lock, stock, and barrel, and off she would go to another town, either Hertford or Norwich where class prejudice would not menace her, and where people were able to appreciate a real gentleman when they saw one.

She chose Hertford as being more select, for Norwich was a shade too close. Rumours might travel. She had aunts in Norwich.

Ravenscroft—and it is still called *Ravenscroft*—was a large comfortable house situated near the old church. It was one of those formidable Victorian villas, with a lot of evergreens about the gate to keep it hidden, and formal flower beds, where perfect ladies could dwell well screened from the road. It should prove the most suitable background for Grandmamma, Mr. Brown and the girls.

Indoors there were all manner of novelties, for the place had recently been done up, and no expense had been spared. Bow windows were there, they were very much in the mode, but of course there was no bathroom! Tin hip baths were the things. They were carted up to bedrooms, stood on a bath mat, towels arranged, and huge enamel cans of boiling hot water poured into them. From that moment the worst happened. You sat in the bath, and froze on top and boiled below. The most sensitive part of the person was done brown, whilst the top part just shivered and shivered. If wise, you kept a precautionary can of hot water beside you to top-up with!

Grandmamma did not bathe; she thought it suggestive. This was not in the least unusual, for lots of people of that era did not bathe. Had not bathing been the cause of the collapse of the Roman Empire? Was not there a lot to be said against bathing? A great deal more than there was to be said for it?

There was a kitchen stove at *Ravenscroft* that was a stickler for its full menu of coal. There was a formidable back kitchen, and outhouses where knives and boots were cleaned, because in the best regulated families this menial service could not be carried out under the same roof as the master and mistress, without considerable loss of caste.

Ravenscroft stood alone. Nobody could have suggested that it was inferior in any sense of the word. It fulfilled all the necessary requirements, without being too racily modern. It was luxurious without giving rise to the thought of extravagance. Grandmamma would have termed it commodious. Certainly a lady could live there and expect to receive callers from all denominations. Mr. Brown would be against his right background, everything should be most satisfactory!

The girls had—as yet—no idea of the plans that were accruing in Grandmamma's funny little head. They knew that the shop was sold, and that they were about to move house, but where they would go, they couldn't think. Unless it was Sporle where they had so often spent summer holidays as children. Eleanor Magee did not think that it would be Sporle.

Polly was fretting badly. She was desperately miserable not to be back at Narborough; she missed the sociable. she thought with hunger of the couple of tricycles that must now have been countermanded! She longed for Mrs. Martin. Missy did not fret. All this time she was looking smugly complacent, as though she had a nice little comfortable secret of her own.

Before Grandmamma could get her own arrangements finally under way, Missy's plans had materialized.

One morning, when the postman arrived with the letters there was one for her in Muriel's writing. All through prayers conducted by Mr. Brown, Grandmamma eyed it with suspicion over her hands when supposed to be praying. Grandmamma did not approve of her girls receiving letters, and always insisted on reading all of them herself.

When she opened the envelope and started to read, there came over Missy's face that smirk of success that conveyed the impression to the rest of the party that she thought that she had been very clever.

Muriel Walker had been lonely. For a long time she had been looking about her for another congenial girl who could come to live with her in the large house at Surbiton. She wanted a girl who would act as a companion, be someone with whom she could go out and about, and yet one who would not despise small menial duties, such as darning and sewing. In those days almost everybody kept companions of some sort or another, and only when Missy arrived on the visit to her friend did Muriel discover how ideally suited they were to one another!

Missy had proved herself to be so helpful and willing; she was always chatty and kind, so that during the fortnight Muriel had developed only the greatest affection for her. She had now talked the matter over with her father, and she wrote offering a comfortable salary in return for services to be rendered, and the one thing which was of far more vital consequence, the home at Surbiton which would take Missy away from the pestilential onus of living with her Mamma.

Grandmamma read the letter and had the vapours. She didn't know what girls were coming to! Really she didn't.

'But,' said Polly completely dismayed at what she considered to be the treachery of such a move, 'you know you made me leave Narborough to come back here to be with you?'

'Yes, I know.'

'You couldn't possibly go away and leave me here alone now. Now that I left my job to come back to be with you?' She was aghast at the thought!

'I shall die if I have to stay here,' said Missy melodramatically. She was always possessed of the idea that she would die, if not from laudanum, from *ennui*.

'But I shall die without you,' said Polly, and she went very white. She had never thought for a moment that she might be deserted. Missy had always emphasized the fact that they were together and therefore could worry through any major difficulties. They were sisters. These arguments, however, had been forgotten. This was what Missy had been planning for all the time, this was the trump card she had been seeking to get into her own hands, and having at last got it there, she knew that she would be a fool if she let the trick escape her.

It was easy to see the reason behind all the darning, and the tape and button-sewing, and the collar-pressing and one thing and another. And it had come off! That perhaps was the most sickening thought of all. Missy had achieved her object.

She wrote to Muriel before she even consulted Grandmamma who was lying on the sofa being attended to by Miss Magee with the smelling salts, the burning feathers and the full Victorian outfit.

One would have thought when Grandmamma came to that this would be one of those occasions when she would have blown sky-high, but the curious thing was that she didn't. When she had time to think it over, she decided that in London Missy, always her darling, would have the chance to meet real gentlemen, and not merely those horrid Swaffham cads! If she wished to go, then darling Missy should go. She had always liked Muriel Walker, and she was sure that Mr. Walker would take the best possible care of her girl. Grandmamma was content.

But, said she, and here was the snag. She stipulated that one of her daughters must stay at home with her, because it was only to be expected that she could not be left without a companion of any sort. When she said this, she obviously did not include Mr. Brown in the companionable category. Polly must stay with her Mamma. Nowadays there was far too much of girls gadding about and earning their living, and

thinking they were being clever. It didn't do. Polly must stay at home.

In spite of this, Polly took some action on her own. Privately she wrote to Mrs. Martin and asked if the situation was still open to her, and if she could possibly reconsider taking Polly back into her household. Whatever Grandmamma might say or think, or however violent the row it entailed might be, Polly did not mean to stay on here alone the butt for the constant quarrels between husband and wife which were gradually growing much worse. To go away to a new place might only make the difficulties greater. There would be no old friends she could run round to see. No Wally! He had always been a great comfort; he might be a scamp, but he was a kind-hearted one.

Unfortunately the fates had now taken a hand against her. Mr. Martin had been very seriously ill, and the family had decided to carry out his doctor's orders and spend the winter abroad with him. Had Polly's letter reached Narborough a week earlier, they might have taken her with them, but it was much too late now for all the arrangements had been made.

Mrs. Martin was very sorry; she would have liked to see Polly again, she said, and perhaps one day when she returned in the spring, they'd meet again? She hoped so.

Reading the letter, Polly burst into tears.

* * *

Life had been very difficult during the recent years in Swaffham, and it was perhaps a good thing in some ways to shake the dust off their feet. There were people here who had known Grandmamma since she had come as a bride, and probably they were less ready to forgive her eccentric ways than strangers would be. For Grandmamma was eccentric.

Missy had set off for Surbiton as soon as ever she could, with a whole trousseau of new clothes made by Miss Lack,

for Grandmamma wasn't going to have anybody say that she was mean to her favourite daughter. Missy wrote glowing letters back, whether to arouse Polly's envy or whether it was just that she didn't think, nobody knew. Polly could not feel quite the same way towards her; the old blood bond had been broken, and possibly for the first time she saw her sister in her true colours.

'Well, I always told you what she was,' said Wally. He had never liked her. 'I thought she'd get William, but even William knew better than that.'

'It was William who started it. If only he had married her then everything might have been happy.'

'For you, but what about William?' asked Wally.

'Oh, he'd have got used to it.'

'Got used to it?' echoed Wally. 'Now don't start being silly. I think it a very good thing she has gone to Surbiton. If you ask me, Surbiton is welcome to her.'

The Browns and Polly Gardner departed for Hertford, and the comfortable serenity of *Ravenscroft*.

The furniture was sent by road and they stayed for a couple of nights in an hotel, which was an aristocratic thing to do, for those were the days of lodgings. Boarding-houses did not exist. The hotel was hall-marked for the rich and classy, but everyone else went into lodgings, and were looked after by an old lady in a black stuff frock and a bead cap, more often than not.

However, on the fateful day they set off in a first-class railway carriage on this tremendous emigration. Grandmamma had her smelling salts handy, and Mr. Brown had a small brandy flask in his pocket in case of emergencies. Polly sat beside her Mamma with Mr. Hall, the fox-terrier, well muzzled, on a lead. Mr. Hall was known to snap at Grandmamma's ankles, but was her pet and therefore could do no wrong. She had that saving grace; she adored dogs.

Any move with Grandmamma in control was a pretty desperate undertaking. She insisted upon doing everything

herself because she refused to trust any other living soul. Like this she did too much, became fussed, tired, and cross, and then let the world have it. Fortunately it was not as it is to-day; the men who worked for her did not dare to chuck in their hands, or throw the furniture at Grandmamma, which would have happened to me, without a doubt.

Polly had very little idea of what Hertford would be like. She thought it would probably be similar to Swaffham where she had expected to live, die and be buried, but there she was wrong! Swaffham is to this day the dullest town in England. It is surrounded by vast plains of land, approached by car from Thetford you drive seventeen solid miles of dreariness and if you see a rabbit you're lucky! One cannot live on the excitement of seeing an occasional rabbit, and Polly Gardner had had this proved to her. How she must have longed for the old days in Germany, with the Rhine flowing smoothly, along with the trips up into the mountains, with the *Liebfraumilch*, the Berlin cookeries and all the rest of it.

As was only to be expected when they arrived at Hertford, Grandmamma was in a state of complete exhaustion. They had taken rooms in the town, the very ordinary kind of rooms, with the old lady in the black beaded cap to do for them. For a whole week they spent their time going to and fro—from *Ravenscroft* to the rooms and from the rooms to *Ravenscroft*. Mr. Brown was not clever at odd jobs; they were beneath him. He could not even speak firmly to the carpenter, which made for one afternoon of really jolly rowing, first Grandmamma and Mr. Brown, then Grandmamma and the carpenter, then Grandmamma having a postscript with Mr. Brown.

Ultimately after this terrific scramble to make the place ready for occupation, they moved in.

Everybody would call, said Grandmamma, and had had several new cards produced for the occasion. It was the right thing to be meticulous about cards. Nobody could use

the printed kind, they were much below the belt. Grand-mamma's cards ran :

Mrs. A. Mavor Brown,

Miss Gardner,

Miss Polly Gardner,

and were left with the top right corner faithfully turned up as was right and proper.

Grandmamma felt that here she ought to have every chance to establish herself in the right manner. Mr Brown was bound to make an excellent impression and to attract attention. Now it was only a case of keeping up good appearances.

On the first Sunday they paraded to church, very much on show for all to see. Grandmamma leant heavily on the arm of Mr. Brown as the devoted little wife *à la* Victoria and Albert. Polly walked dutifully behind them carrying the prayer-books and Bibles for the lot, all in a neat black velvet bag made for the purpose. It was just too bad that Mr. Hall decided to come bouncing through the evergreens—*Ravenscroft* garden backed on to the old churchyard—and joining them riotously in the porch. There he contrived to bite the verger before he was forcibly removed by Polly, and he made the worst impression on the Hertford congregation. It was all so very unfortunate being their first time on show, and poor little Grandmamma had to bring out her smelling salts that she kept concealed in her muff against such misadventures.

However, she managed to make a really remarkable recovery from this bad start, comforting herself through the service in the most exemplary manner, and following every line through that maddening little spy glass of hers, being over fervent with the amens.

She did not look about her. She was never one of those who was interested in other people's bonnets. She had gone there to be devout, and devout she was. When the long dismal service was ended, she sailed down the aisle on the

arm of the husband with the handsome whiskers, and she looked up into his face admiringly; I think that she still admired him enormously. She thought that he had never had a chance; she believed that coming to pastures new she was giving him that chance.

It wasn't any good.

Hertford didn't like them. Hertford looked at them and saw through the whole thing. They had burnt their boats behind them, and the new town was going to be very slow to receive strangers in its midst. New towns are like this, they are slow workers.

Missy had gone off into the blue and she kept writing from gay Surbiton saying that nothing would ever induce her to return to the misery of home life, for she was having a most wonderful time, and how Polly must envy her! Polly's heart had gone like lead. They went to balls, they drove in cabs, it was all so chic and *recherché*. They had beaux galore, and met gentlemen who really were gentlemen, and not like the awful young louts she had met in residence at Swaffham.

That was one for William Plowright and Herbert Rattigan with a vengeance. She added as a postscript that she hoped Polly was liking her new life at Hertford.

Polly wasn't liking it.

She felt that life had served her a very dirty trick, and she could see nothing ahead of her. No hope. It was just existing day by day, and not much fun to be getting rid of your life that way. Little Polly Gardner was most desperately unhappy.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ON THE WHOLE HERTFORD WAS A PLEASANT ENOUGH little country town and a good deal more go-ahead than Swaffham had ever been or was ever likely to be, possibly caused by its proximity to London.

The reason why nobody really wanted to know Grandmamma was incredible. It never came out. There seemed to be no sense in it.

It was pathetic that the best china was always being hopefully exhibited praying that someone would call. At the critical hour, Grandmamma would sit tee-ed up with the Coalport, her party cap on her head, and she would work herself into a cold, but unfortunately not a silent, fury when she found that it was all to no avail.

Day after day this tragedy was endured. The best silver teapot, the drawing-room fire lit, and the cushions tastefully unruffled, waiting as a spider for a fly.

No flies penetrated.

It is true that a few old maids called, possibly egged on by curiosity, or so Grandmamma thought. The vicar arrived but without his wife, which was a severe blow to her pride because she understood the significance, and had had it before. The omission put his visit into the parochial class and not the social one. The doctor was called in to stem an attack of nose bleeding that she had, and although he murmured something about his wife coming along to call later on, she never did.

Those days were circumscribed by etiquette, and therefore it was maddening, especially to a woman of my Grandmamma's calibre. Worse, there was nothing that she could do about it. The people whom she didn't want to know came

in in ones and twos; the people she was itching to become acquainted with and so give herself a hoist up on the social ladder, were conspicuous by their absence.

It didn't improve her temper.

Living near at hand was a pleasant spinster in the thirties, called Miss Harrison. In those days nobody seems to have possessed a Christian name at all, or if they did, they were never called by it. Mr. Brown was always Mr. Brown and never Arthur to Grandmamma. Miss Harrison was always Miss Harrison to Polly.

She kept house for her bachelor brother, a large florid man, who, report said, had got his complexion out of a bottle; this was a rumour hard for him to defeat because most certainly he looked like' it. The Harrisons were comfortably off, and lived in a pleasant freehold villa, with a couple of important pillars propping up the portico, and an enormous plaster lion sitting on top of it, in quite the British tradition.

(I have never seen why the sitting lion should be so much more British than the springing one, but it always appears to be so.)

Before long Polly and Miss Harrison became friends, they had met at church decoration at Christmas, but they never arrived at the intimate stage of Christian names which were rigorously taboo.

Polly was utterly lonely in Hertford and so miserable that she would have welcomed anybody. She was encouraged into the Harrison household, and before long it became apparent even to her that Mr. Harrison was paying her attention. His sister patently favoured it and was doing her best to egg things on. This was odd, because usually sisters are not so keen, especially when it may entail the sacrifice of their home, but there it was. Miss Harrison was charmed.

Polly did not like Mr. Harrison very much, he was one of those large swaggering gentlemen in a handsome but

loud check suit which was considered to be very sporting indeed, and coming into fashion. Never for a moment had Polly thought of marrying him, even though it might be to get away from home, and even if he were a *parti*, but it was a trifle awkward for she did not know how to be warm to his sister and cold to him. She was genuinely fond of the sister, and had no wish to lose her one friend in the place.

Mr. Harrison followed all the accepted routine of valentines with pink bows, of choice flowers murmuring their discreet messages, and a pair of 'kids' at Christmas. You could give a pair of 'kids' without becoming too deeply involved; anything more meant something!

Polly's one endeavour was to keep Mr. Harrison at arm's length and prevent him from proposing to her, and so alienate her from the only house where she could visit as a dear friend. Because when it came to it, she would have to say no thank you. She knew that Miss Harrison wanted her brother to marry; now she guessed why. He was a bit of a rake. It wasn't women, it was wine and betting, and he was a four-bottle man. His sister thought that he would settle down once married, and for a long time she had been searching the neighbourhood to find a suitable wife for him. She had fixed on Polly.

Polly did her best to escape. She thought that he was rather a coarse type; he ogled, which was considered to be bad form, and she didn't like some of the things that he said, chortling to himself and remarking that 'it ought to do for *Punch*'.

Johnny had moved up to London in yet a new job, and just as Grandmamma thought she had got herself nicely settled, down he came again in search of funds. Grandmamma was continually worried. Something awful had happened to the little girls' capital. There was nothing that she could do about it and she didn't blame Johnny. It had been just that bad luck that strikes some people. She knew

that Missy could be kept quiet with extra pin-money, and anyway she was apparently enjoying herself so much that she was too occupied to start asking awkward questions. That was one blessing. But Polly was the dangerous one; for the time being the danger had been parried—Grand-mamma had pointed out how very unladylike it was for a woman to discuss financial matters at all, and how undutiful to her dear Mamma—but at the same time, it might not be parried for ever. And she knew it.

Women knew very little about incomes. They were supposed to be outside their province. They took what they were given and asked no questions. They never knew how much their husband earned, and would not have dared to ask. That would have been very rude.

The girls were all given pin-money to dress on; as married women they had their housekeeping money for which they were supposed to render proper and accurate accounts, entered up in suitable little books and proffered to the master of the house every Saturday night.

Grandmamma followed the routine faithfully, but the bother was that her accounts never balanced, and she would flush deeply as she tried to diddle them into proving.

Husbands were extremely strict. They demanded that every penny should be accounted for, else where had their good money gone? They were quick to reprimand and most cutting in their acid remarks as to extravagance. All wives were afraid of them, that was the right thing.

Not of Mr. Brown of course, because he was in a bad position having started off on the wrong foot, with the result that the whole root of the trouble was that Grand-mamma wasn't afraid of him. He earned exactly nothing at all, and had apparently no private means. She did not have to look to him for financial security, but he had to look at her.

Early on in the marriage, when she had been so very much in love, they had worked on the principle of 'What's mine

is yours', but time had stemmed that idea. There was nothing like it any longer!

Grandmamma hadn't been established in *Ravenscroft* a year before the old restlessness got at her again. She was sick of the house. She thought the locality was snobbish, and decided that she would move to St. Andrew's parish which was the other end of the town. There she understood there was a broader-minded rector who would be nice to her. For Grandmamma blamed the church for a lot of this.

She happened to own a really beautiful old house, which was situated practically in St. Andrew's churchyard, and is to-day a butcher's shop (that would have made her turn in her grave had she ever known of it). She'd go down there, she said.

She gave orders for a few windows to be knocked out and a few doors knocked in, and then off they all went to live at *St. Andrew's*. It was a larger house. It looked better, and there the people might be less choosy.

Here, however, Grandmamma made a most unfortunate start.

She was an indefatigable gardener and for these valiant efforts kept a special gardening hat (everybody said it was an old one of Mr. Brown's), hung in a dark corner o' the hall.

Coming in fatigued from shopping one morning, she did not take off her original bonnet, but sat back with a glass of port and a macaroon to give her substance, and, when a trifle recovered, decided that out she'd go to do a spot of gardening. Taking down the correct hat for the enterprise, out she went. What she did not realize was that she had popped it on top of her bonnet, and she looked more than a little peculiar digging in that costume.

The stretch of garden was brazenly exposed to the churchyard, and it was a very high church, ardent in keeping all the saints' days with processions round the churchyard, and little boys in red cassocks and lace, bleating *Salve Festa*

Dies, etc. This happened to be the morning of *Corpus Christi*. I am convinced that not one of the little boys missed the sight of my Grandmamma digging her garden and wearing a hat AND a bonnet, and I expect that they thought she was drunk.

Grandmamma did not drink.

I should like to make this quite clear, because I have frequently referred to hot gin and brandy so that my reader might easily surmise that Grandmamma tipped. But this was not so. Those times were less abstemious than they are to-day. Everybody drank and ate in a much larger proportion, accepting it as part of the routine. Hot gin and brandy, topped up with plenty of good port 'to make blood', was the accustomed mode. We think that cocktails enfranchized us along this line, and that we moderns are very go-ahead in our attitude towards spirits and drink. Of course it's complete nonsense. Any languishing lily of the 1880's could give us points when it came to a quiet spot of drink.

During that period of history every woman had a glass of port and a macaroon at eleven, when we drink coffee and would never dream of wanting anything stronger. Everybody went to bed with a nightcap, otherwise how on earth would they have slept? The nightcap was preferred hot, in that it made the effect more potent. The sexes drank alike; they drank the same drinks, save that the gentlemen naturally took more as was only gentlemanly. Teetotallers were laughed at. It was cissy.

Even little Polly Gardner had drunk light white wine at school, and had gone down the Rhine elated by it. She expected port in the morning, and something a little elegant at night. She didn't think it peculiar, because it wasn't peculiar, those were the times in which to eat, drink and be merry, and they darned well did.

Save that very little of the merriment seemed to come her way, and Polly had lost heart. Now she dared not be too

friendly with Miss Harrison, because the advances of her bibulous brother were slightly pressing. Occasionally she went away on a visit to Stockport with the Leighs, who constituted the one bright spot in her desert of living, but it became increasingly embarrassing seeing that she could not ask them back here to stay with her at Hertford, which they understood.

Life seemed impossible.

Then one day just when everything was at its drabbest and she felt more depressed than possible, she went out shopping. Rounding the corner of the street she ran straight into young Harvey Bloom, walking towards her with a smirk on his face and a dog collar round his neck.

* * *

James Harvey Bloom was the new curate, having recently been ordained at Harlow.

He had taken his degree at Cambridge, and was full of the exuberance of living. He was one of those hale and hearty young men who obviously do very much enjoy being alive, so much so that he infected everybody he met with his vitality and personal charm. He was very tall and over-heavy; he had a mop of curly red hair and the very pink complexion that goes with it. He had grey blue eyes with twinkles in them and a most infectious laugh. Though what he found to laugh at was a miracle, because he had had a most difficult life himself, his mother leaving his father when he was three weeks old, and he being brought up by his grandfather and grandmother and a family of spoiling aunts, all of whom were so much on the rocks as to make it very stony going.

Taking orders he had come to his first curacy at Hertford, had only just arrived and for the moment hardly knew a soul. Therefore he was all the more pleased to see a familiar and friendly face—and what a mercy it wasn't Missy, said he to himself. He had never been able to stand that young woman!

Although Polly had never known very much of Harvey, they had been acquainted for practically the whole of their lives. They had met at children's parties, he in kid boots and a velvet frock, she in little frills and a sash. At the parties they had not liked one another too much, but meeting like this—two lonely young people in a strange town—it did mean that they started off on the right foot and could talk. They compared notes, and discussed people they knew and all the Swaffham gossip. What was Atty Palmer doing? Had Gerald Hudson married? What was Wally Plowright up to? Always a bad letter-writer, when he DID write, Wally would say improper things about Grandmamma, knowing quite well that she insisted on reading every letter that her daughters got because she believed it to be the right thing to do. The last letter had caused a packet of trouble, and little wonder! Polly had written to him modestly requesting him to refrain from further correspondence. She just couldn't bear it any more.

Harvey had been rather spoilt as a boy, in that his early surroundings had been entirely female. His grandfather lived in a study wedded to Greek and Latin, and the grandmother and the four aunts had hummed round the child. He had already had several love affairs, because he longed to anticipate the exquisite moment of falling in love about which his aunts were always chattering. They had told him that it would be the emotional pinnacle of his life. To the women of that time marriage was everything, and there was no second string to their bow. If they came out of the teens unmarried they panicked, and had to do something drastic to speed up romance and so put themselves on the right side of the fence.

Harvey was a very impressionable child and young man; his daughter inherited a lot from him in that way. If she had not done so, she could never have written this book. If she had not been fascinated by her mother's stories of her own girlhood, 'little Ursula' could never have written so exactly

the life that had been discussed with her. Much the same thing happened to Harvey. His aunts had told him the thing to do was to fall in love, and he went about wanting to fall in love. He burst with honourable intentions. He got an immense thrill out of proposing and the subsequent engagement, but after a short space of time, somehow or other the affair always seemed to drift. The first savage fires of love cooled; the thrill ceased to be. Then the engagement was broken off, so that he had a reputation for being something of a jilt, a very unsatisfactory reputation to get. What it really seems to have been was that he was in too much of a hurry, and was continually rushing his fences.

He considered it most romantic to be meeting Polly Gardner like this. Fate! Kismet! What have you? She had improved a great deal in appearance; she was really quite pretty and glowing, and she talked amusingly. He liked women who could be amusing.

It was a long and exciting chatter of 'Do you remember?' and 'Have you heard from?' which is always immensely exhilarating to the people concerned, though deadly dull for any outsider. He told her all the Castleacre backchat; he gave her the cream off the dull everyday milk of the Swaffham news. And also he promised that he would most certainly call upon Grandmamma.

A few days later Harvey appeared on the doorstep of *St. Andrew's*, saucer hat in hand, fully prepared to be asked to tea. The unfortunate thing was that he didn't care for Grandmamma, and had never fostered any illusions about her being anything but the proper old tartar that she really was. He very much disliked Mr. Brown. But one thing he had decided when he rounded that corner in Hertford was that he did like little Polly Gardner quite a lot, and it would take more than Mr. and Mrs. Brown to put him off.

She herself was in the mood to fall in love, and Harvey was quite the most charming young man she had ever met. He was brilliantly intelligent, talking only of events not of

people. He was interested in the world beyond their immediate small town. He was the first person she had ever met who was essentially 'different'.

Before a week had passed—and it was a very joyful week for the two of them—a red herring was drawn inadvertently across the trail; it was all just an accident. Making an excuse to leave a book at *St. Andrew's*, Harvey met Mr. Harrison sitting there in one of his loud check suits, sipping tea in the approved grandiose manner and making eyes at Polly. He was saying a lot of 'Ha, ha', and 'Dem it now', which was considered to be fashionable and to give it all a nonchalant air.

So that's the little game, thought Harvey.

He much disliked Harrison. He thought him an odious creature with not two thoughts in that silly pumpkin-shaped head of his. In other words he was a beast. Undoubtedly the presence of this wolf in the fold helped to hot up the fires of love. Harvey became more ardent.

It was all in the springtime, that fatal time when a young man's fancy goes wandering off along the blossomy lanes, and lightly turns to thoughts of love. These two met whenever a chance offered itself and although quite probably they did not realize it they were for ever making chances. They went over to Hartingfordbury together, walking in the budding woods there; to Bengoe, then lying in exquisitely unspoilt country. They visited Panshanger. Those were the days! Then the whole of rural England was lovely and serene; it was not cut up into plans for ribbon building; the villages were little separate villages each retaining its own personality, and 'estates of' the subsequent kind were unknown.

It was England!

Harvey was intensely interested in architecture and knew a lot about it. He made very excellent sketches of every church he visited, and collected these with data attached in a special book. He was engrossed in natural history. The

world was an open book from which he chose to learn, and later on he was to contribute very handsomely to the knowledge for other men to read. He became a famous genealogist, and was to be a great man.

It is true that he did not undertake any of the sporting activities that had engrossed Johnny Gardner. He was too clever in other ways, and Polly recognized the immensity of his ability.

Now, for the first time since she had left the Martins' establishment, she had met somebody to whom she could talk intelligently, and she was delighted. Harvey taught her a good deal about ecclesiastical architecture; about natural history; about the world in which they lived.

They explored the local churches, but they went very quietly about it, for naturally it would never have done for people to see them and so excite comment. Everything had to be done surreptitiously, it would not be the right thing to be caught out walking with the curate. There was a special trysting-place, a tree where they always met just outside the town. It was on the pretence of Polly going primrosing or violeting to bring back something pleasant for her dear Mamma's sitting-room, or Harvey was district-visiting to satisfy his priest, and anyhow everything worked admirably.

For a bit!

One April day when they were walking in the woods where they were purported to be primrosing, quite suddenly Harvey came to a halt and asked his little Polly to marry him.

I don't think she had expected it.

I don't know what she had thought the outcome of this entrancing acquaintance would be, but she stopped short to stare in surprise at him. It couldn't be true. She knew that in appearance he was not attractive, but his mind attracted her enormously. He could see the funny side of life and was always so amusing in the way that he discussed things. They

could laugh at life together and it was something new for Polly to be able to laugh. But there was one very awkward snag. Extremely awkward for those days. Harvey was nine months younger than she was; she had been born on St. Patrick's Day, whilst he was a Holy Innocent. He always laughed a lot about his birthday, but it was entirely wrong, in fact almost criminal, to marry a man even three days younger than you yourself were. It couldn't be done.

'What rubbish!' said Harvey.

It seems inconceivable that it wasn't so rubbishy. The world is ruled by a certain curriculum. You can't escape it. To-day I could marry a man twenty years my junior and nobody would be seriously disturbed. But in those days Polly knew quite well that the fact that she was senior to Harvey even by those few months, might be very distressing indeed.

But he won his day. He was an ardent and delightful young man, and quite irresistible.

No longer did little Polly Gardner have any scruples about the meanness of marrying before Missy did, and so keeping to that ridiculous pact they had made between them in Bonn-am-Rhein. Harvey thought this pact had been one of the biggest pieces of bosh he had ever heard of! It could only have ended in the pair of them being left high and dry as old maids, and he said so. It was just the sort of daft thing that a couple of schoolgirls would hatch up, said Harvey!

They sat on a fallen tree in that lovely Hertfordshire wood, and just for a while it seemed that life was almost too beautiful to be true. They could not believe that so much happiness was going to be theirs. Then of course they remembered the immense difficulties that lay before them, for somehow or other somebody had got to tell Grand-mamma. They had no idea of how to tackle her, but ultimately decided that sufficient for the day was the evil thereof, and they refused to spoil the beauty of the moment with the awful thought of what was coming to them.

Harvey just didn't care. He thought nothing of Grandmamma anyway, she was just an awful old woman, said he.

'But, Harvey dear, she's my Mamma.'

'All I can say is that it's very unfortunate for you,' he retorted.

They sat there side by side, with his saucer hat spiked artlessly on an alder whilst they chattered. They'd never be very rich, but did that matter?

'I have the money my Papa left me,' she told him.

'What happened to that?'

'When I come of age.'

'But,' said Harvey, 'you are of age! You were twenty-seven last St. Patrick's Day, why aren't you having the money? You ought to be.'

'I didn't come of age till I was twenty-five, my Mamma said.'

The curious thing was that she had never thought very much of this. Of course she ought to have been having the interest all last year, and Johnny and her Mamma were trustees.

'Oh well, that's gone then,' said Harvey Bloom, who was a good guesser.

Polly hoped that he wasn't going to be difficult about her Mamma, because she would have to go on living in the house until she was married, and it might be embarrassing. They discussed the point of breaking the news. After all Grandmamma couldn't do a great deal, for Polly was of age, and much as Grandmamma might dislike the idea of her marrying, she could not stop it.

'And if it comes to a row,' said Harvey, 'I can give as good as I get,' which was absolutely true for he was a hot-tempered young man to go with the hair.

'Yes, but what about me afterwards?'

'You leave all that to me.'

'Only I am worried,' she confessed, 'mine is a difficult house, and rows do boil up in it.'

'I'm in charge of this row,' said he, 'you've never had anybody to stand up for you before, and now you're going to find life very, very different. You're going to be most awfully happy—for a change.'

The following morning Harvey presented his Polly with a small ring of carved gold, made with three oval-cut amethysts set in an antique setting. Later in the day—during their discussion the afternoon before, they had decided that when high tea was over and done with was the most propitious moment—he called to have a word with Grand-mamma.

Poor Polly had the jitters!

High tea had already been dispensed with. Mr. Brown was sitting at the head of the table in his smoking cap and with a pipe, whilst Grandmamma superintended the removal of the sardine dish, and the cold pie in conjunction with the Britannia metal teapot. Already she had one eye cocked in the direction of the sofa, for she was always 'fair wore out' by five thirty in the afternoon.

She had to assist with the clearing away, bustling about, and was very annoyed when Harvey caught her in the housewifely apron which she always got out for such duties. It was all very difficult in those days; you had to wear these things, yet it was disgraceful to be caught in them.

Harvey appeared at exactly the right moment.

'Could I have a word with you, Mrs. Brown?' he asked, but he wasn't nervous. Harvey wasn't the kind who gets nervous on that sort of occasion. If it was demanded of him he was perfectly prepared to have a darned good row with Mrs. Brown, and have done with it. He was primed for war.

Polly had been sitting on pins all through the meal and now was so thoroughly frightened that she rushed upstairs to lock herself in her bedroom. She tried to calm herself down by composing a letter breaking the news to Missy at Surbiton. She knew it wouldn't go too well. She felt rather worried about the pact that Harvey had dismissed so readily

because she hated being mean to Missy, even if Missy had been mean to her. But she still loved her elder sister in some queer tenacious way that refused to be dismissed.

She knew quite well that she would never dare go downstairs again, until Harvey had settled the whole thing with her Mamma, and then a fine upset there might be!

Grandmamma was annoyed to see Harvey in her house when she had got her housewifely apron on. Also she wanted to have her habitual snooze. There was no fire ready lit in the drawing-room, which she felt put her at a singular disadvantage. She liked people to think that she used the drawing-room every day of her life, as the classy folks did. She could not possibly ask the gracious Mr. Brown to vacate his place of honour as master of the house, and so leave her and Harvey Bloom to have a quiet talk in the dining-room. It was Mr. Brown's 'perks' to sit in the best chair and smoke in comfort staring blankly into space. He never said anything. He never knew what to say.

It meant that Harvey and Grandmamma would get the cold drawing-room allotted to them for their talk which in itself was irritating. So off they went into it. She had no idea what he had come about. Something parochial she guessed, he possibly wanted money for something to which she didn't want to subscribe. Parsons generally did that for you.

Harvey did not beat about the bush.

He said that he had proposed to her daughter Polly yesterday and had been accepted. He told my Grandmamma quite formally that they intended to get married as soon as ever they could.

Grandmamma looked at him with the expression of a hostile shrew mouse who has seen the cat in the distance, and is not impressed by the sight. She said that she was indeed most surprised that she had not been consulted. It was most indelicate and entirely unpermissible of Polly to think of marrying when her elder sister was still single.

'Well, I can't marry both of them, can I?' asked 'Harvey.

Grandmamma gave him the familiar kestrel look that the family knew very well indeed. She sat there erect and prim, she was now thoroughly angry.

Harvey explained that if his financial position agitated her and he had better say here and now that he had no private means whatsoever, only his stipend of one hundred and ten pounds a year, he had something else coming in time. His father had made a marriage settlement, and when his mother died he would inherit a few pounds a year which he was fully prepared to settle on Polly. He had ability and he could work. Nobody could ever say that Harvey Bloom was afraid of work, and the harder it was the better he liked it.

(I remember once in the village when none of the men would cut the churchyard hay for him because it was too hard work, he took up a scythe and did it himself, and told them exactly where they could go—and stay—in consequence!)

But he had met his Waterloo in Grandmamma. She seemed to be in a very petulant mood. He reminded her that as far as Polly herself was concerned, everybody knew that her Papa had left her a thousand pounds to accumulate till she came of age, and as he had died when she was about nine it must be a comfortable little sum by now.

This remark must have been a red rag to—well, not exactly a bull, but certainly a cow, and it got Grandmamma going round in circles. It was the last thing she had wanted. What Harvey did not know, though he may have guessed it, was that the money was not there.

Grandmamma stuck her nose in the air announcing that nothing would induce her to tolerate such a silly engagement, or such a shocking son-in-law, and if he thought she would sit there a moment longer listening to his trash he was mistaken. Up he boiled! He explained that as Polly was of age, Grandmamma's sanction did not make one

ha'p'orth of difference. As to his being a silly son-in-law, anyway, he was in a profession which Grandmamma's men never had been and never would be. Hadn't he been over with his own grandmother to buy twopennyworth of castor oil from Mr. Brown several times already? And didn't Mr. Brown speak to him as 'sir'?

That was not tactful!

Grandmamma simply bursting with fury, folded her arms on her high stomach and said that he could go and leave her, because never in this world or the next would she consent to this marriage. It was revolting! All the Blooms had been impossible. She had hated his crazy aunts, she had disliked his grandfather and grandmother, nothing would make her consent to this.

She did *not* snooze that night!

I imagine that whilst Polly was writing to Missy, Grandmamma must have found time to dash off a few urgent lines (crossed and re-crossed in the traditional style) to her son Johnny to ask him what the next move—if any—was to be? And how they would ever come to explain that something awful had happened to the money?

She had a stupendous row with Mr. Brown, and when Polly came down hoping that the cloud had passed, Grandmamma met her on the bottom stair, averring that the Blooms hadn't got a farthing with which to bless themselves, and she couldn't think what the modern girl was coming to.

Polly wept bitterly.

She knew that Missy would be furious with her. This would be the bitterest blow of all to a sister who had gone off in the hopes of meeting a handsome husband, to find that the ugly duckling who had stayed at home had actually had the audacity to become engaged. Only this morning she had in the utmost secrecy confided in Miss Harrison what had happened, and Miss Harrison had turned cold, and had accused Polly in no measured terms of jilting her brother.

The jilting business was the most ominous thing of those times. Everybody was always getting jilted, or jilting somebody else, and apparently you did not need to be engaged to anyone to be classified as a jilt.

In the middle of one of Grandmamma's first-class rows leading up to hysterics, a messenger arrived with an affectionate note from Harvey for Polly saying that he loved her, and always would. He enclosed a pressed ivy leaf as a token of the tenacity of his purpose. He wasn't defeated and he said so.

It comforted Polly very much.

What neither of them realized was that at that particular moment my poor Grandmamma was in hell!

CHAPTER NINE

THE AESTHETIC CRAZE WAS RUNNING LIKE A COMPLAINT through England and everybody was more or less infected by it. Harvey had got it badly, with the result that he laid himself open to a good deal of comment. Artistically minded, he had found the late-Victorian precepts and ways extremely irksome, and he seized upon the æsthetic craze as being something of an outlet. To us nowadays it sounds absurd. But at the time it was an innovation and the curious thing is that the incoming fashion is nearly always attractive, whereas the outgoing one is frumpish.

Nothing could have been more ultra-hideous than the beige chemise frocks that came into England after the First World War, but at the time they seemed to have charm. People went mad over them! Therefore after the dowdy stolid Victorian dress, it must have been attractive to fly to the other extreme. Young women walked about carrying a poised iris or a sunflower. It was the cult of the cummerbund. A peacock's feather worn nonchalantly through the hair may sound ridiculous to us, but was then all the rage.

Harvey Bloom was one of those young men whom people loved or hated; he dealt in extremes. He knew his own mind, he had definite ideas, and the result of that was that although he had friends or foes, he had no acquaintances. We know into which section we would have put my Grandmamma.

He was very keen on the æsthetic craze and there were a lot of young women in Hertford who just swooned to be led by him into this new era. There was a passion for a particularly bilious shade of green, for looped muslin, and for sandals. In vigorous opposition there were some anti-æsthetic women, who were not quite so young (dear Miss

Harrison was actively among them) and they jeered at all the large sunflowers and irises, and thought that all the young people had gone mad.

But it marked the end of solid Victorianism. That type of furniture and entourage was now rapidly waning, and the pendulum swinging the other way there was a craze for Liberty curtains, for pink cotton with black unicorns and elephants all over it. People fell for madras muslin at windows which hitherto had been dedicated only to chintz. The bow was everywhere, England was in fact completely bow-minded, and Grandmamma, to be in the fashion, had pink bows tied to the feet of the commode.

Music had changed too. The song at twilight and the dim dreamland faces which had haunted people a few years earlier, were now replaced with Harvey singing, 'Tell-me-pretty-maiden', at local concerts in his strong bass voice. It was considered to be screamingly funny when he gave vent to 'The flowers that bloom in the Spring, tra-la!'

Polly played accompaniments and longed for the day when she also would blush and simper over 'The flowers that bloom in the Spring, tra-la', because then she would be Mrs. Bloom. The century in its sere and yellow was changing the trend of things in more ways than one. Life was altering.

* * *

When Missy received Polly's letter at Surbiton she could not believe it. She would have passed out into fit after fit of wild hysterics save that at the time she happened to have hopes of a rich stockbroker for herself, hopes I regret to say doomed to disintegrate upon her. But she was furious. She could never forgive her sister for behaving this way, and especially when she had promised to wait for Missy to marry first.

When she did write she was *triste*. She was pathetically reproachful, for she was an adept at martyrdom to make everybody feel thoroughly uncomfortable.

John^{ny} ignored the engagement.

He was expecting another baby, and was having trouble come from all directions at once. But the major trouble was if his little sister started being annoying about her money. She'd have to be stopped, but how?

Grandmamma having slept on it tried to pretend that it had never happened. She was very good at this, it was the best trick she had got up her sleeve, and believed that if you just carried things off with a high hand and stolidly set your face to the wall, nobody could shift you from your perch. As far as she was concerned a complete silence was drawn over her interview with Harvey in the cold drawing-room. She never mentioned the engagement. She never even noticed if Harvey were in the house. She looked over him and under him and through him, but never at him. As far as she was concerned he did not exist.

It wasn't at all comfortable for the young couple, and Harvey thought that the best thing they could do was to cut this rather difficult period as short as ever they could. Matters were unlikely to become easier. Grandmamma did not intend to be amiable about matters and continued to ignore the whole thing. Between them they decided that they would get married before the winter, and tentatively fixed the date for September the eighteenth.

'We shan't be well off,' said Harvey, 'but we are young and strong, and I dare say we'll worry through. There's my hundred and ten.'

'And there's my money,' said the hopeful Polly.

'Yes, *if* there is your money!' I think he had already got an idea that it might not be there.

* * *

Polly now launched out on that most important thing, the trousseau. It was very urgent that everybody should have a good trousseau because this was supposed to last you for years and years, if not for ever. To have a small trousseau was a definite lowering of status.

Like all the girls of her era she had been making linen for her 'bottom drawer' ever since the days at Bonn. Everybody did it. There were towels with crochet ends, and embroidered pillow slips, and natty little mats and something of this and that. Whilst she was studying at Bonn she had made yards of exquisite braid lace, and she was the most adept needle-woman.

She adored doing the work. As a small child she had aspired to it, and had been fobbed off with that infernal duster-hemming supposed to be part of a little girl's education. Once when very young she had found tucked away in one of the sitting-room drawers a piece of half-finished *broderie anglaise* dedicated to my Grandmamma's personal work. Grandmamma sewed vilely, but did it because it was the right thing and gave the impression that the little woman was handy in the home. The child, discovering this, treated herself to a few stitches here and there. It fascinated her. The dreadful time arrived when Grandmamma fished into the drawer for her awful bit of work, only to find that some infant hand had laboriously and extremely indifferently finished it off for her in all senses of the word.

There was a row.

Now Polly made a list of suitable things required for this trousseau. As she would be badly off the thing to do was to have it capacious so that she would not have to draw on Harvey's pocket for renewals for many years to come. Apparently the fashion in underclothing never changed. It just went on and on the same old way. It was the epoch of Cash's cambric frilling, and of torchon lace. Flighty undergarments were frowned upon and almost unknown. They would only have given gentlemen ideas, and gentlemen had ideas enough—Heaven only knows—without being given an additional spur to them.

It was important to start properly on the trousseau and would have been unthinkable for a lady to marry without

less than one dozen of everything. Anyway that was being more economical than Grandmamma had been, for she had had two doz. of everything and then a doz. of second-bests besides.

Polly's list covered twelve chemises, six best, six second best, and matching drawers. Twelve nightdresses, twelve bodices, twelve petticoats, six flannel petticoats, two pairs of stays, six pairs of cashmere stockings in black (coloured ones had been in, but had now gone out because such awful people wore them). A dressing-gown and bed jacket, a dressing-jacket and a shawl. A nightdress-case and brush-and-comb bag to top it all up with. The latter was an important addition.

She got a dressmaker in to help her with the sewing, and now the house became a turmoil of snippets and bits and pieces. Through all this Grandmamma drifted in a haze. She was still determined to see nothing at all, and apparently never even noticed what was going on. She had set her mind stolidly against it all, and nobody dared refer to it in her presence. Never once did she enquire whither all this energetic sewing should be leading; although she cannoned into the visiting dressmaker on the stairs—knowing perfectly well who she was—apparently she never even saw her. No, she had determined to ignore it all, and ignore it all she did.

How in the world one got married from a house where the owner refused to admit that you WERE getting married, Polly could not imagine. She only prayed that before long Grandmamma would 'come round'.

'She won't,' said Harvey with truth.

However, there were other troubles bothering them, and some of these were a little more complicated than Grandmamma being difficult.

It worried Polly that Harvey appeared to be making no move towards providing a house where they should live after they returned from their honeymoon in Lowestoft. Also,

even if they had the house, they had no furniture, and would have to get some. Harvey had no nest egg.

Life had been very difficult for Harvey to get anything like a nest egg. At sixteen he had started his career as an assistant schoolmaster to a dame school, run by an old lady called Miss Billing, a nice well-upholstered old creature who had been very fond of him. It was a case of all found, but very small salary. He had only been able to scratch his way through. Cambridge had been gruelling and he had had to spend most of his spare time there coaching others to make ends meet.

His grandmother wrote to the bride-to-be from Castleacre offering to spare anything that she could for the new home (when they got it), but, like other brides, Polly had wanted to furnish it with her own and not somebody else's taste. Besides, furniture was in a whirl. It was changing very noticeably, for an era was passing.

Harvey had decided that he would like an aesthetic surround, Polly wasn't so sure. But anyway there was no room for argument, because so far there was no house, so no furniture was required.

However, towards the end of June when the snippets were a veritable cambric snowstorm in *St. Andrew's*, Polly felt that something really must be done. So she spoke to Harvey on this important subject.

They went for one of their long walks, with the idea of rubbing brasses in a neighbouring church, armed with paper and heel-ball, and en route they had their first tiff. Harvey had been thinking very seriously over the whole position. Finally he had arrived at a definite conclusion. From the beginning, although he had said nothing, he had been considerably worried that Hertford would not be big enough to hold both himself and Grandmamma! I have always thought that he was entirely in the right, but Polly did not think this, she wanted to stay.

It is etiquette for a curate to remain in his first curacy for

at least 1 year, otherwise it tends to give the Bishop ideas, but Harvey was an impetuous young man, and his theory was 'be blown to the Bishop!' Living in the same town as Grandmamma tagging about on the arm of Mr. Brown was more than he could or would stick, and he said so. If the Bishop didn't like it, then he could lump it. Had the Bishop never had a mother-in-law who was more than he could muster? Harvey had been looking around him with the one idea of escape, and recently he had heard of a curacy that would be becoming vacant at Harwich, on the East coast, and where there was a pleasant house in West Street which they could occupy.

At first Polly was completely horrified.

I expect in her heart she felt guilty that her family were coming between Harvey and his chances of preferment, by driving him out of the place. She felt that she was the primary cause of all this and said so. Harvey thought that was rot! Anyway he loathed his present rector who was an ignorant old jackass, so he said, and gradually, bit by bit, she gathered that there had been a difference of opinion, a very strong difference of opinion.

She remembered that the Harrisons had told her that the rector was a tricky bit of goods, and Harvey was a rather tricky young man, though naturally at that time Polly did not think so; she was in love. Any episode with that fat little Cupid with the four fat cheeks to him, is liable to be fairly blinding to a girl.

Polly wept a little and Harvey blustered about it. but the making-up was very pleasant indeed, and finally they came to the conclusion that Harwich would be a good idea. The clean cut was perhaps the best move they could make, Grandmamma was not likely to get more amiable, Mr. Brown would never be anything more than a fool, and it would be better to be away from the whole lot.

The row cleared the air, and their future home was finally settled upon. It would be in West Street, Harwich, opposite

the drinking fountain. It would be large and topulent-looking, a gawky house stuck into a row with other gawky houses, and there they would be very happy, they were sure.

The trousseau was being made and it all seemed to bring the wedding day very much nearer. But there was one immense hurdle still there to be taken. How could they persuade Grandmamma to realize that all this was really going to happen? If anyone mentioned the forthcoming marriage to her she changed the subject, and just raised her eyebrows as though it conveyed nothing at all to her. If she fell over bits of the trousseau lying about, she just fell! But nothing on this earth would make her allude to it. She carried on this superb attitude of complete indifference for longer than anyone could have believed possible.

Her elder brother—Uncle Arthur—brought her round. Uncle Arthur was to give Polly away. Johnny couldn't, for the reason I suppose that he had already done it when he filched the legacy. Uncle Arthur came down to stay; a sad-looking gent, with sandy Dundrearys. Uncle Arthur spoke severely to his sister. His sister answered back, but that had broken the silence. She was a trifle afraid of her elder brother, and he wasn't afraid of her which was a very good start.

'I never gave my permission,' said Grandmamma tartly, when he tackled her.

'Bosh,' said Uncle Arthur, 'Polly is of age, she doesn't require your permission, and anyway she's marrying very well.'

'I don't think so. I don't like him,' said Grandmamma. (Anything more mutual than her dislike of Harvey and his dislike of her had to be seen to be believed.)

But now she had come to! She would just tolerate it. She would not actively discuss it, she was all set to be as trying as she could about it but she would allow the wedding to continue.

(What a woman! said Harvey.)

Missy was to be the only bridesmaid, and would be coming down to stay for the occasion. Plans went ahead, but of course one thing became more and more urgent and that was to know how big Polly's income was. She was relying on it to cover the cost of her own clothes and Harvey's, and to pay for those little extra luxuries which made all the difference between a meagre form of life and a happy one.

However, there seemed to be no way of bringing Grandmamma to the point of discussing this income. Grandmamma knew nothing of money, she said, besides it was vulgar. She never had approved of vulgarity.

Now what do I do? asked Polly.

In late August something obviously had to be done, and Harvey said that he was the one to do it. They had got to find out how they stood. It is true that he had made several abortive attempts to get at Grandmamma on the subject of Polly's elusive income, and every time she had managed to fob him off because very naturally she wanted to avoid anything in the nature of a show-down.

It seems strange to us that nobody asked her bang out. But that wasn't the period of history when you asked anybody anything bang out! There was all this beating about the bush, and avoiding any awkward question. But the hour had now arrived when it was vitally important to have more definite details so that they could cut their garment according to their cloth. Harvey arrived at *St. Andrew's* determined that this time he wouldn't be put off, and he'd have it out with the old—I should hate to think what he actually thought she was, or die for it!

Grandmamma must have been writing agonized letters to her son Johnny, and getting very small comfort from that source I am sure. He was in another state of financial chaos, he always was. The mere mention of money sickened him. Besides, what was the good of talking about the stuff when

it was spent? Get-out-and-don't-bother-me was his angle on it.

Grandmamma was a self-righteous woman; she had never expected any of this, and I am quite sure that she was worried to death and that was making her additionally difficult. It was a terrible situation for her to be in, because she was devoted to Johnny and would not believe any wrong of him.

Harvey caught her completely unprepared digging in the garden in the appropriate hat.

'I must plant out these seedlings,' said Grandmamma, purple in the face with her efforts.

'Do, but it needn't prevent you from talking.'

'I have nothing to say to you,' said Grandmamma.

'But I have something to say to you,' he retorted, 'I have come to talk this out. It is about Polly's income.'

This time he was going to stay here till he knew what had happened. Seeing that nothing would budge him, Grandmamma (who must have been aching to scratch his eyes out) fell back on a woman's wiles. She knew all the tricks. She insisted that she knew nothing of business, she was an artless little creature, her métier being the house and the house only. It was ungentle for a lady to understand figures, and so she had allowed Johnny as her co-trustee to manage everything for her. I think probably some of this was true, in particular the Johnny part of it. Johnny was such a clever boy with money, said Grandmamma, and so fond of his little sisters, and such a dear good brother, etc. etc. etc.

Harvey listened to all of it with patience but considerable sinking of the heart, for he had no opinion at all of Master Johnny. Then back he came to the point again.

'What is Polly's money invested in?' he asked.

Off she started!

She explained that dear Johnny, with only the kindest fraternal intentions, had put the capital into his last job

(but two) where he had hoped by sheer hard work to make a fortune for his dear little sisters. Had he not been forced to work for cads, for bounders and the most disreputable who did not understand him, she was sure that he would undoubtedly have made a brilliant success of it all, but of course he hadn't been lucky.

'But Johnny's job wasn't a trust fund,' said Harvey growing a little hot at the thought.

Grandmamma had always disliked him, but at that moment she must have loathed him. How dare he force an entry into her garden and pester her with his silly talk? A nice thing for the curate to do, she must say! He knew she understood very little about money, and he seemed to think of nothing else. She was in a mess and she must have realized that there was no way out of it, but whatever else happened she now prepared to do battle and shield her eldest-born.

'Johnny will explain everything; he can't be troubled at the moment, because they are expecting another addition to the family,' said she with spirit.

Usually she would not have mentioned so intimate a matter to a man, but a clergyman was rather different, he and a doctor were presumed to know the facts of life, and so she brought it out pat.

'Well, I'm sorry to be so insistent, but Polly and I have to make our own arrangements, and this can't wait. We must have details. Why has Polly never received any income so far?'

'Hoity-toity, talking to me like this,' said Grandmamma arming herself against the coming war. 'Polly never wanted an income, I have always been good and generous to her, and have given her handsome pin-money. . .'

'That's not the same thing as having her own money. Her father left it to her; where is it?'

At her wits' end Grandmamma flung down the garden spade and strode into the house. She flung herself on to the

sofa and gave way to screaming hysterics. Polly burnt feathers under her nose, and Harvey slapped her hands (I think he possibly enjoyed that part and did it with relish). Mr. Brown put brandy to her lips and kept saying, 'Oh dear, oh dear!'

It was a horrible scene.

'My heart, it's my heart,' groaned Grandmamma.

'She's all right,' said Harvey coldly.

'You cad!' said Grandmamma coming to in a fury to have at him again. The Victorian little woman could make a better and bigger scene than most, but unfortunately this time she had struck the wrong man.

Although he knew nothing of business, Harvey had been brought up with women and knew too much about them. He'd seen hysterics and vapours before. His Aunt Augusta could throw as pretty a fit as most! He wasn't frightened by an exhibition of sheer bad temper, even if the rest of the ménage was scared that the old woman would die. Also although he was the veriest child in finance he had smelt a rat, and he didn't intend going home to his digs until he had run it to earth.

When she ran out of breath with screaming, he opened up the argument again. He was a brute! But then he knew that if he did not get to the point now, he never would. The absurd part was that if anybody was entitled to go into screaming hysterics, it was Polly and not Grandmamma at all. And if there was any cad in the picture it was Johnny Gardner.

The poor old lady couldn't shake Harvey off. He stuck like a limpet slapping her hands when she screamed and asking awkward questions when she didn't. It must have been awful for her.

At the end of a most gruelling evening when even Mr. Brown turned limp, the servants were red-eyed and in tears, whilst the house fermented round one little termagant of a woman under five foot in height, the truth came out. In the

hall the shattered young couple faced one another horrified at the prospect of their pruned future.

When they had undertaken the house in West Street, Harwich, it had been with the idea that there was some private income of a vague nature, something over twenty and under a hundred a year, but now they knew for certain that there was nothing. They would be expected to live entirely on Harvey's stipend at Harwich, and that was one hundred and twenty.

'I'd sue that something-or-other Johnny,' said Harvey now in the most unclerical mood.

'How can I? He's my brother, and it would only drag poor Mamma into it too, because she was the trustee with him. If there is any blame, in law she'd have to share it.'

'Well, I think she and Johnny ought to pay up? They did it.'

'But how can they pay up when the money isn't there?'

It obviously would have to be smoothed over and forgotten, but that did not ease the present situation very much.

It seems to his granddaughter quite tragic that John Gardner who had wanted to do his best for his two little girls, should have left them entirely penniless through his choice of trustees. Harvey never suspected Grandma of complicity, but he realized that like a lot of other women where her son was concerned she was a complete fool. She went to bed with an inelegant complaint known as Spasms, had a burst of nose bleeding so that they thought she had broken a blood vessel, then arose paler, but in no whit less vigorous with fury.

The truly awkward part was that now the young people had really not got enough to marry on yet were forced to go through with it. The wedding day was but three weeks ahead, and the banns had been read. Everything was fixed.

If they backed out now, as Harvey could foresee, everybody would say that he had proposed to Polly for her money

and when he had discovered that she hadn't any, had jilted her.

It was the same old worry of the jilt which seemed to disturb everybody so terribly.

He decided that he would rather starve in marrying her, and although the years ahead might be lean and thin, she took it courageously and was prepared to go through with it.

'We shall have each other,' she said.

* * *

Although wedding presents kept on arriving at *St. Andrew's*, Grandmamma took very little notice and hardly looked at a parcel. Now she was tolerating the wedding, but little more. How to give the reception was agonizing Polly, and finally she asked if her Mamma would object if she had a few friends in to tea. Grandmamma hummed and haw-ed, then asked when it was she wanted her few friends to tea.

'September the eighteenth at three-thirty,' said Polly blushing.

'Now, let me think!' Of course Grandmamma knew perfectly well that the eighteenth was to be Polly's wedding day and finally rather grudgingly she said, 'Oh, very well then.'

She was possibly a bit fussed as to what people would say, that always agitated her. She must have realized that she couldn't have a wedding from the house without everybody noticing her own actions, and she would have to come round.

A week before the wedding day Missy arrived back. Missy was very smart and townish; she had chic frocks, and a new hair style. She was quite the young lady, and she talked to Grandmamma on Polly's behalf.

They got on to the dining-room sofas together in one of their interminable siestas, and whether Grandmamma opened her heart to her favourite daughter, or what happened between them, nobody ever knew, but after that Grandmamma accepted the fact that Polly was to be married

on the eighteenth and that afterwards there would be a small party in *St. Andrew's* to celebrate it.

She even agreed to attend the wedding in person, leaning on the arm of Mr. Brown (it was quite disgraceful that he had not been asked to give the bride away, but that Uncle Arthur had been made to do it), but nothing in this world would induce her to buy a new bonnet for the occasion. •

No, said Grandmamma and stuck to it.

New bonnet or no new bonnet, everybody felt that this was a step in the proper direction, and after their difficulties, things were clearing up a little.

Polly had planned to be married in her going-away frock, a pale brown (known just then as almond-brown) with a little white chip bonnet, and a spray of real orange blossom which would be the gift of the groom. He detested artificial flowers and was determined that she would wear the real thing, little realizing how strong the perfume was so that almost everybody was asphyxiated by it! Polly would carry mauve asters, and Missy dressed in mauve would carry cerise ones.

Pretty weddings have never run in our family, and Polly's was no exception to the rule. The only pretty one we ever had was my second one, when the church doors were locked and a couple of red-nosed witnesses was all we got at eight on a snowy November morning. Nobody saw my pretty wedding, save the parson, the vergers and the witnesses who were so cold from driving at that ungodly hour through a snowstorm that they were past seeing anything.

When Polly's almond-brown frock was finished by the dressmaker it did not look so attractive as a pale green brocade which had been intended for dinner-party wear—very important in those days. Missy, who was the dressy one, advised a change round and ultimately they decided on the green, though with some trepidation because it was such an unlucky colour.

'Do you think there is anything in it? And anyway what else could go wrong?' besought Polly.

'You could both die,' said the gloomy Missy.

The matter was more complicated by the fact that it being the curate's wedding, the whole place was determined to make a 'do' of it. It was to be fully choral. St. Andrew's was a high church, and they thought this was a glorious opportunity to indulge in a lot of tiddly bits. Harvey had declared that he would not feel himself to be properly married unless their hands were tied together with a white stole, he wanted a *Gloria*, he was talked out of a subsequent communion because of it making the service too long.

'I shall swoon,' said the apprehensive little Polly.

So far in her life she had accepted religion calmly as being part of her upbringing. She had not questioned it because girls of that age questioned nothing, but now when she contemplated marrying the curate, for the first time she began to think seriously about things. She had been first stirred to thought by the unfortunate fracas at Emily Gamble's, when old Mrs. Gamble had appeared so strangely. Now she was thinking of religion itself, and the upshot of it all was that she wasn't sure of anything any more, which is perhaps the first stage towards greater initiation.

Missy was sourly jealous. The handsome stockbroker whom she had thought she had got in tow had proposed to Muriel and had been accepted! Could anything have been more unfortunate? Missy had completely misinterpreted his meaning. She had thought of throwing one of her familiar scenes but on second consideration wondered if it might not entail dismissal, and then she would be sent back to Hertford to take Polly's vacated place in the household, which wasn't her idea of fun. So she had gritted her teeth and had borne it; but with oh, what agony of mind!

Missy would be twenty-nine in January, and Wally's last letter to the family had enquired in a jocular manner if

Missy realized at last that she was fixed on the shelf for good.

There was nothing for her now and she knew it. The only thing to hope for—and how she was hoping—was to live on in Muriel's new home after the smart wedding that was to come, and to be kept there as companion housekeeper. It would need tact—never Missy's strong suit—but when choice lay between helping Muriel run her home, or coming back to be at Grandmamma's beck and call, it paid Missy to be tactful.

The whole of her future was pleasantly set if only it worked to pattern, and she had got to see that it did work to pattern. All the same it was humiliating in the extreme to have Polly marrying a professional man, and even if the Blooms were poor they were a good old Norfolk family and she knew it.

Harvey came in to pay his respects on the first evening. The girls were sitting sewing under the trees at the far end of the garden, trying to get the last bits of the trousseau finished. Harvey had never liked Missy very much, but he wanted to be amiable. There had been rows enough already, he didn't want any more. So, trying to be nice, he asked, 'And what are you making?'

Missy was stitching at an unfortunate garment, referred to by modest handmaids as 'a pair of them', and she thought that Harvey was getting at her. Turning very red and angry, she bundled up her sewing and bursting into tears ran up the garden into the house.

'Oh dear, now you've offended her,' said Polly, 'she was sure to take it the wrong way.'

Harvey's attitude was that if he had got to offend her, as far as he was concerned, it was better sooner than later. Another week and they'd both be out of this awful atmosphere for good. He did not think he could stand much more of it.

That was a dreadful week.

Fortunately there was a great deal to be done, and little notes of thanks to be written. The best present that arrived was a pair of silver entrée dishes—they adorn my table to this day—from Uncle Jacob at St. Albans, Uncle Arthur was purported to send a cheque. He wrote:

‘I’m sending you a cheque because money is always so useful . . . ’

but apparently he personally found it so useful that he forgot to enclose it. That is the sort of thing that happens when marrying, and you never know whether to write and explain, or write and thank for it.

The young couple had no time to meet privately or to talk and the nearer the marriage came the less proper talk between them was considered to be.

It seems dreadful to think that in those days people plunged into marriage with no knowledge of themselves or what they expected from the alliance. Nothing rude could be discussed until afterwards and then of course it was too late. It was the accepted thing that they would have children whether they wanted them or not, and could afford them or not, that did not come into the question. Babies—anybody’s babies—could not be mentioned in the presence of those about to be married. Bedrooms could not be mentioned either, and had to be discreetly avoided. Sex was entirely ruled out and never alluded to in any shape or form. Although nice young gentlemen kissed and caressed, they were very careful not to go too far. All their overtures were scheduled, conversation could not be chaste enough.

Therefore the nearer you came to your wedding day the more milk and water it all was! I should have thought that it was a tricky life to live.

Everybody was wondering what on earth Grandmamma would give the happy pair as a wedding present. So far she had not mentioned it. Mr. Brown had given nothing either, but then he always copied what his wife did. He just stared

into space and said less than ever. It is true that on the evening of the day he made the classic remark, 'I think it will be fine to-morrow,' but whether he referred to it with an eye to the wedding or not, nobody knew. Not, they thought! The girls half expected that Grandmamma would appear on the morning of the day itself, with a handsome piece of jewellery in her hand and a blessing on her lips. Not she!

Last thing on the night before, she rapped smartly on the door of Polly's bedroom, where Polly was packing her things. She turned to Grandmamma thinking to herself 'this-is-it.'

'I've brought you something', said Grandmamma. She was standing there with a very large new bath sponge in her hand, obviously a left-over from the days of the chemist's shop. 'I thought you might have a use for it', and she left it at that.

Whether it was the wedding present or not, they never knew. But whatever it was intended for, Polly got nothing else.

* * *

The eighteenth of September started brightly, one of those lovely days that rise out of a lazy mist, and the bell of St. Andrew's (determined to do their duty by the curate whom they liked), rang it merrily in at dawn. No longer could my poor Grandmamma declare that she had not the faintest idea of what was on, for she was deafened before she was awake, and appeared downstairs for prayers in one of her vilest moods. Nobody heard a word of the prayers, for on and on went the bell-ringers, determined to make a proper do of it.

Before they had even got the breakfast on the table Grandmamma had sacked one of the maids, and in a sudden burst of fury had slapped Missy. Having been so long in Surbiton and away from the atmosphere of Grandmamma

in the house, Missy wasn't used to this sort of thing, and took it badly. She made a bolt for her bedroom and barricaded herself inside it.

The bride had a good cry. All along she had felt that the wedding wasn't going so well, and now she wanted it over and done with. She wished they'd eloped. That would have been the thing. She was deeply agitated about the money side, for it was most worrying to find she had no income whatsoever, and she wasn't at all sure that she could make do on what they had at Harwich.

Her things were all packed, and the labels were addressed in her round childish handwriting:

Mrs. J. Harvey Bloom,
65, Marine Parade,
Lowestoft.

It looked very unnatural, she thought.

However, to-day she had other things to do than just to be sorry for herself. She had to comfort the indignant bridesmaid furious with Grandmamma for slapping her, and declaring that she'd take the next train back to Surbiton and dear Muriel, and forgo her duties at the ceremony altogether.

At the last moment Mr. Brown, who had been most dreadfully heckled by Grandmamma, turned huffy and decided that he wouldn't go to the wedding at all. That tipped Grandmamma and up she bridled; she declared that if he didn't go, then she wouldn't go and what in the world would people say to that? How could anybody expect a lady to go up the aisle without a gentleman to escort her? And what gentleman was there to take Grandmamma to church, if not Mr. Brown, who was the best-born gentleman in all Hertford?

Whilst all this was going on the bells of St. Andrew's Church rang right merrily and nothing in this world would stop them! If they did stop it was only for about two minutes for a change of ringers and just to fool Grandmamma that

they'd given it up, then another most dreadful clashing would start again.

The guests arrived.

Uncle and Aunt had driven over from St. Albans where Uncle Jacob lived. Uncle Arthur arrived off the London train, and still without the cheque. He was fostering the idea that he had been exceedingly generous to his niece; it is curious how people do get hold of this idea when they have done you completely in the eye, and are most annoyed if you happened to be ungrateful for small mercies not received. Until this moment everybody had been quite sure that he would be bound to produce the coveted piece of paper on the day of days. Now all hope of that faded and poor little Polly was to go without.

The scene was set.

Upstairs Polly was dressed in the pale almond green brocade with waterfalls of old lace and the absurd chip bonnet. The real orange blossom had smelt the house out and made her feel faint. Also she was very nervous, and Missy was in a temper, and Grandmamma—but let us not speak of Grandmamma.

From the vantage-point of the front bedroom window the girls could see people trooping into the church, for the marriage of the curate was an occasion. Schoolchildren grouped themselves with baskets of autumn flowers to throw before the happy couple as they returned from the ceremony. The Young Men's Christian were forming a guard of honour and were hanging about the tombstones waiting for directions and fighting one another for the best positions. All the church workers, the vestry cleaners, the Dorcas meetings and the girls' friendlies were marching into the church to take their seats within. It promised to be a full house.

Miss Harrison went in. She had sent a most distressing jam jar with an ormolu kingfisher on it, a few startling bulrushes, and a marigold the size of a rhododendron. (Later

the children of the rectory called it the jam jar Mother's young man had given her!) Uncle took in Aunt. Mr. Brown dutifully led forth Grandmamma. Grandmamma was got up to kill in spite of everything she had said to the contrary. She was in her best frock with a lot of taffeta frills, and she carried her spy glass, the too large prayer-book and a single aster to betoken the fact that she was the mother of the bride. Very smug did Grandmamma look as though she could never have said boo to a goose, as she was led into the church to a prominent position in the front pew on the left.

'She's in a dreadful rage', whispered Missy from behind the bedroom curtain.

Missy went last. Missy in mauve with pink asters. Missy who could not believe that this awful thing had happened, and she was being left on the shelf whilst her younger sister got married.

Uncle Arthur awaited Polly in the hall, stroking his marvellous whiskers and consulting the large turnip watch his grandpa had left him; he shut it with a click and enclosed it tastefully in the waistcoat pocket. ~

'We ought to go, my dear', said Uncle Arthur.

It was not the moment to recall the absence of a cheque believed to have been enclosed, but oh, how Polly wished that she dared say something! Even one pound would have meant so much to her and Harvey, and it couldn't have been for less than five surely?

'Shall we proceed?' he asked.

The church was absolutely full. Everybody was there. The organ pealed forth 'The Voice that breathed o'er Eden' which is apparently the prelude to all marriages, and led by the processional cross and all the little boys in clean surplices, three clergy, etc., up the aisle they went.

The rector was determined to do this thing well, and Polly had to run the full gamut of ritual. Anyway this was the end of her life with Grandmamma, and that was something to be thankful for.

Harvey enjoyed it.

The flower throwers were marshalled in readiness. 'Now dears', said their leader when the bells started off again. The Young Men's Christian stood to attention. The organist kept looking to the vestry and waiting for the word go, all poised for the wedding march. A verger appeared. 'Oi', said the verger and jerked a friendly thumb at the organist.

Pom, Pom, pi-Pom! went the organ.

The bell-ringers rang a merry one. They'd give Grand-mamma something to be getting on with and they did, for they rang the day out as gustily as they had rung it in. Harvey had apparently supplied free beer and it had made things go with a swing. (I rather think he must have done it on purpose.)

The reception was not a wild success because Grand-mamma was in a terrible mood. Healths were drunk, and polite little speeches made. Then Polly went to change into the almond brown frock in which she would leave for her honeymoon. She was radiant. In her quiet way she did love Harvey very much indeed. She believed she was marrying a man who would one day be great, and in that she was right.

They drove off to the station with the choir boys running alongside the cab to give them a really jolly send-off. Then hand in hand my Father and my Mother started on the most romantic journey of all.

* * *

Honeymoons change with the periods of history in which we live. Early in the century it would have been considered very rude to have gone away unchaperoned with a gentleman, even if you were just married. A maiden aunt usually went too. Why the choice should fall on a maiden aunt, Heaven only knows, as it could hardly provide the voice of experience to be consulted in an emergency.

My great grandparents the Blooms drove off with great-great-Aunt Mary sitting opposite to them in the coach, and

for a month she guarded the bride most zealously. I have never yet discovered who thought this tasty maxm out. It seems to me that she must have been hideously in the way, but for a whole month nothing would shake off this gallant sheep dog, but at the end of that time it was apparently surmised that the marriage must have been consummated, and therefore there was no need for the preservation of further proprieties.

By the mid-century couples actually dared to set off on their honeymoons alone together, in the most blatant manner. Their parents were shocked; it was emancipation.

Of course they had to be a little careful about it all. It was not the era of the hotel. There was the inn, or the private house (lent for the occasion) or that rather frightful compromise between the two, known as 'apartments'. These were the vogue. Rich young couples generally departed for some private house which had been lent to them—with adequate staff—by a friend or relation for the honeymoon period. If *à la mode* it should be for a couple of months.

People like Harvey and Polly took apartments somewhere, and suitable ones had been found for these two at Lowestoft. Much later that evening the train drew into the station, and they hired a fly, and they and their luggage drove along the Marine Parade where they were to stay.

Apartments were very much alike. There was probably a front room with its grim Victorian furniture, heavy red tablecloth, a few stuffed birds, and all the ponderous equipment of living; and a bedroom about which there was nothing in the least honeymoonish, because that would not have been considered to be in the best of taste. The large brass bed had come into fashion, with iron slats and noble brass knobs, some of which had come loose so that they sat at a rakish angle. There would have been a honeycomb quilt and a Brussels carpet, a prominent commode, a pregnant-looking washstand with over-patterned ewers and jugs, and a cupboard below about which there was something

slightly taboo. The pictures would have been Landseer and Marcus Adams, or the dear Queen reading to wounded soldiers, or the dear Queen with an Indian attendant driving out to or from somewhere.

But the emotion that came to this forbidding-looking room is always new; lovely and exhilarating it can defy the most terrifying obstacles, and even the drabest background. The young couple knew of nothing better. To them the apartment room was the best they could hope to get, and when you know nothing better even a honeycomb quilt can be entrancing.

Unfortunately they knew very little of one another, for their earlier lives had been as the poles apart. They had no idea how life would go for them and were badly handicapped by the fact that any intimate conversation prior to marriage would have been wicked.

Polly's life had been prominently influenced by her time spent at Bonn-am-Rhein. She had always thought of a honeymoon in those terms. Walking in fir forests, or under flowering cherry trees, river trips with the music of Strauss and Mendelssohn and Schubert. The opera. Gentle evenings spent together in conversation, everything on that pinnacle.

Now Harvey's idea of a honeymoon had been drawn from his home at Castleacre, and Castleacre was not big-minded. He had had too much to do with the love affairs of my great-aunts; he wanted to sit on the beach and read poetry to his beloved, or sing a few songs at the piano with its yellowed keys and tattered rose silk behind the fretwork front. His was the ivy leaf and pressed forget-me-not aura, and had little in common with hers.

Both were at first disappointed in one another.

Polly believed it right for the man to have his own way, and override the woman because he was the stronger vessel. Besides at Lowestoft when she came to think about it more clearly there were no bands to dispense Strauss, no gardens, and no fir forests. The place was rapidly closing down for the

winter. The beach huts were being gathered in, the fortune tellers and the waxwork shows going into hibernation.

On the better days they sat reading Tennyson on the beach, but Polly had never admired his work too much. They visited churches in the locality, which she preferred, it all seemed to be a mere continuation of her engaged days and not something entirely new and entrancing.

She was a little bored by the beach rapidly getting more and more derelict, and she did hope she could wean Harvey from his love of Tennyson. But oh, what a relief it was not to have to be always on her guard against irritating Grand-mamma! Oh, what a joy not to see Mr. Brown hanging about the place! What a bliss to know that this would last for ever! No looking back.

At the end of a fortnight they returned to Hertford to collect their things and make ready for their exodus to Harwich. They had left the hyper-romantic world behind them. No more sitting on the deserted beach with Tennyson, no more walking about the little town that was growing less and less noisy with the visitors gone. They had returned to realism.

A week or so later they went down to Harwich.

* * *

Harwich was a prosperous little place with the Essex marshes lying behind it and the harbour sweeping in. The young Blooms were imbued with the one idea of making a grand fresh start, and they were determined to make life thoroughly satisfactory.

The house in West Street was large for their means, a tall thin abode, but the one maid was good and efficient, and although the furniture was scrappy, Harvey arranged it successfully being very good at that sort of thing. He arranged the china prettily, with an eye to colour effects, and both of them were delighted with his handiwork.

But whatever else happened their poverty had to be

hidden from the rest of the world. Appearances were most important, and must be maintained even in the teeth of the most bitter frugality. They were quite prepared to do their best to conceal their poverty, and put a brave face on the whole proceeding, which was most important in that era. People called. Some of the ladies of the parish fell for Harvey in a big way, for he had immense charm for women. His was perhaps an indiscriminate charm, and got him into a lot of trouble whereas Polly's attraction for men had more depth, but then in her whole life she had only attracted one or two, whereas Harvey could boast that he had charmed the lot.

Harwich wanted to meet the new curate.

The rector was a difficult man. (They always seemed to be.) He quarrelled with his curates, as they were warned, and he did not like the second-in-command to be more popular than he was himself, which incidentally was easy for everybody loathed him. He had a cantankerous wife who ruled the roost, and a daughter who rumour said desired marriage beyond all things, and divided her attentions between giving the dear soldiers a treat at Colchester, or coming nearer home to bring a little joy into the life of the poor sailors at Harwich.

Like this she got talked about. To be talked about was definitely wrong, it led to complications; she got that all.

Harvey was young and dashing. He had arrived here simply bursting with fresh ideas for the running of the parish; although at first the rector thought that this six foot of young manhood with its full dark red cavalry moustache, was a joy to have about the place, when he found himself being cut out well and truly, it wasn't half the joy! In time it was less than that, and he was furious.

Polly liked Harwich and the ladies who called at the appointed hour and stayed the appointed time. One could only call between half-past three and four, and on a first call it was very rude to stay longer than twenty minutes. Suitable cards had to be left without ostentation in the hall.

There were embarrassing moments when small clusters of polite ladies jarred one another on the step of the house in West Street, each intent on doing the right thing in the right way at the right time. It was particularly trying when some of those 'not on speaking terms' met like this, each refusing to give way to the other because of the loss of prestige, and carrying the row on into Polly's drawing-room with the wickerwork sofa, the occasional chairs, and the bulrushes!

Harwich was definitely Service.

Hitherto Polly's only experience of the Services had been the *Oberleutnant* of the Death's Head Hussars, at Bonn-am-Rhein, who had behaved surely as no *Oberleutnant* should, dallying up the vine, or down the rose garden. Now she was to meet some of the catty clientèle of the small Service town, and before very long all the backchat was hers. She knew everybody. There was the Captain of the *Hotspur*, and of the *Penny-lope* (as all the sailors called it), and everybody asked everybody else out to dinner, which saved on the food at home, but naturally had to be returned which wasn't quite such a saving.

These dinners made rigorous inroads into their finances. They were served on the best damask, wreathed in Virginia creeper, or some such foliage, and with proper pomp. For the first course you conversed with the gentleman who had 'taken you in' (always such an odd sound, to me); for the next course you conversed with the gentleman sitting the other side, and so on throughout the meal. The right-hand gentleman never encroached on the left-hand gentleman's course, he knew better.

At home of course it was difficult to cope, but the one little maid served up the meal cooked previously by Polly, and she sitting back would never bat an eyelid but pretend that she had never caught sight of it before, but that some unseen warrior of the oven had sent it up in accordance with the style demanded.

Nobody must be poor.

It was very common to be poor, so one drew the madras muslin curtains over all that and made believe that there was no such thing as money, it just flowed in!

Those were the times when everything was cheap. Eggs were twenty a shilling, but considered expensive. Butter was tenpence, bacon the same. Fish came up alive and kicking from the beach, to be bought at the rate of an enormous basket for sixpence, which you lived on for a week, wondering how you could get rid of it all before it went bad on you.

A whole cod cost eightpence. My father bought one and laid it on the kitchen table, well pleased with it, but it wasn't dead and started bullocking about the place, scaring the maid, so that he had to go down with an axe to dispatch it. A live cod in the kitchen sounds a bit like the bull in the china shop, but it was certainly terrifying. Of course neighbours were very kind to the curate who they believed was hard-up. How right they were! An occasional bird found its way into their capacious cellars, used as a larder, for all Harwich is capaciously cellared. The place is honeycombed with secret passages used for smuggling, and offering an excellent means of escape.

Polly was very glad that she had married. It was nice having a gay companion, and life was entertaining. They walked for miles, they explored the Essex marshes, and Constable's country. The Oakleys where—to this day—the strange old English is spoken, using the 'en' as plural (housen, mousen), etc. They danced a lot, and dined a lot. Life was good.

One Spring evening Polly leaned on the taffrail of a ship, and talked to an officer in blue and gold. She had recaptured some of the romance of Bonn, and she liked the uniform. She rather wished that Harvey's best suit wasn't quite so green, but you can't have everything in life. It was that evening that Polly dropped her big brick. A young French Naval officer was there, and she made the crashing mistake

of speaking fluent French to him. The rector's wife (also there, and not going over in a big way) disliked this; she did not appreciate a curate's wife who had been educated above her own limited standards. She thought it was dreadful to be able to speak foreign languages as well as your own, even though the French officer was delighted. And—being a French officer—of course he couldn't shut up about it, but had to babble ecstatically. Another nail in their coffins.

Harvey and Polly were a bit too bright, and before long the rector and his wife wagged their heads, and began to wonder what they could do to get rid of them.

Polly felt ill. The anaemia was back again. She felt so ill that finally they called in the doctor who was a dear old fossil (doctors were then much as now, you paid your money and got no choice) and he prescribed for the anaemia. He snapped at her when she suggested that perhaps she might be going to have a baby.

'Play tennis,' said he, 'and think less of yourself!'

In those days you didn't call it nerves; you called it conceit. So Polly went round to a lady friend's lawn and played a pretty game of pat-ball, getting the minimum amount of exercise out of the performance, and finally fainting away dead at it. On that occasion a Naval doctor from Shotley happened to be there, and he diagnosed it as being the good old complaint of the newly-wed.

'Not a doubt about it,' said he, and referring to the Harwich practitioner, 'the damned old fool!'

'I thought it might be that,' said Polly.

'Not a doubt of it. In November,' said he.

* * *

You would have thought that these two young people would have been knocked flat aback at the thought of having a baby on a hundred and twenty a year. On the contrary they thought it rather a good idea. It was the right

thing to do to have babies though a little more expensive than it used to be in Grandmamma's time. But they'd muddle through. Both wanted a girl.

Everybody had a baby in their own home; nursing homes were not in existence. A nurse was engaged to stay with you, or a woman who had done some training in nursing but was not necessarily a midwife. Whether she knew her job or not was unimportant, all that was required was someone to sit up with you and capable of bathing a baby. She would get three guineas for the whole thing—if lucky!

A doctor would not be called in unless absolutely necessary, and what was absolutely necessary seems to have been a somewhat elastic rule. Women got up on the tenth day, pale and wan, but still determined to make no fuss—they were then formally churched and that was the end of having a baby.

Matters have grown much more complicated, but all the same are considerably safer.

In those days the whole beano cost in the region of five pounds, and that was if you wished to do it on a luxurious scale. Women always fed their children for the first year, so that you lived as cheaply for two as for one. All the same babies grow up, and I should have thought it was a bit petrifying for the Blooms contemplating the education and maintenance of a family on so little.

They wanted the baby to be like the Blooms, for my mother's side of the family were not good lookers and the Blooms had everything the fairies could give them at their birth. It would be trying if the child turned up like Harvey, who favoured his mother's side—she was a fat little nudding of a ginger nature.

Polly began ardently sewing for the layette because of course everything would have to be made at home. And everything meant a layette on the same principle as the trousseau, twelve of each. Grandmamma at Hertford adopted her old attitude of ignoring the whole performance,

just as she had done for the wedding. The wicker bassinet was dispatched from Castleacre, and everything was prepared for November. No more tramping over the marshes, and pat-ball. No more nipping about the harbour in acrid little steam pinnaces, and dining on board with unladylike scramblings up and down iron ladders. It had been fun whilst it lasted, but it was over now.

Then they did the unorthodox thing (another nail in their coffin, for it was an orthodox age), they changed their doctor. Harvey was not the man to stand wrong diagnosis when it was something that the merest nit-wit should know. Up he bridled. What he had got to say he said emphatically.

Things were getting somewhat complicated at Harwich. The rector and wife and daughter openly did not like the curate. He was still doing wonders with the Young Men's Christian, and very popular with the rest of the societies; he organized natural history forays, and everybody was too charmed with him, which annoyed the rector more than ever. Harvey was taking centre stage. Also the rectorial daughter, used to mild intrigues with the curate, felt that her father had made a mistake in employing a married man. She had had no luck with Harvey, who didn't like her and could never hide his feelings when in that mood, and she turned against him as is the manner of a woman spurned.

'Well, what does she expect?' he asked hotly.

'That you should be more tactful,' Polly warned him.

Already there was an atmosphere. The majority were for him, but those who were not for him were most certainly against him. He had got the church workers now set to work rubbing brasses, buying themselves botany boxes, and collecting specimens, and unfortunately the sight of Harvey, all seventeen stone of him, chasing over the Essex marshes with an upraised butterfly net above his saucer hat, started fun in the wrong direction. One particular old woman made a great song and dance about it, and he, getting angry, said

that she was an old cat. It was true enough, and being one of those men who couldn't let sleeping cats lie, he went down and had a set-to with her, which she lost.

What he didn't realize was that old cats don't sit back and accept defeat in the sporting spirit. This one got her claws in, off she went to the rector. Harvey had called on her in running shorts and a sweater, on the return journey from a game of fagger with the Y.M.C.A. She thought the fact that he was showing his knees was disgusting. The row simmered for a bit, but it wasn't done with, and was all the worse for not having come to a head and probably Polly knew it.

Harvey planned to take his holiday in September, so that they could have a good time before she became too clumsy, and then they could get back comfortably before the happy event in November. As there was no money, they decided they would stay with relations. Polly did not want to go down to Castleacre, and Harvey was requiring some data from the city churches—he intended writing a book on them—so they thought of Uncle and Aunt at St. Albans.

Uncle had always been very generous to his nieces, and was only too willing to have Harvey and Polly there for a fortnight. The farm was a large pleasant old house standing back from the Sandridge lane, with a green field before it, mellowed milking sheds and stack yards flanking it, and a bit of gorsy heathland behind it.

When they returned later on to Harwich, then they would settle down to having the baby. The nearer the time came, the more Polly liked the prospect. But she did hope it wouldn't be like Missy or Johnny.

'It'll be worse if it's like your Mamma,' said Harvey.

The having of babies is all a matter of a lucky dip in the old bran tub of life. The Bloom inheritance was a beautiful carefree one with excitable natures shot through with a flash of genius. The Gardners produced something of another ilk, and Polly saw the prospect of something quite frightful

turning up. Still, they'd cross that bridge when they came to it.

They started for their summer holiday on one of those hot September days, with the mist lying on the sea pinks and lavenders of the Essex marshes. Arrived at Liverpool Street, they trotted to the city churches as though on a pilgrimage. It was hot, very stifling, and the trouble was that they tried to cram a week's sight-seeing into one day. Their meal consisted of sandwiches which had been cut by the maid at home to save expense, and they ate it sitting in St. Bartholomew the Great.

Harvey was so busy taking notes for his book, and so rapt in it, that I doubt if he noticed how dreadfully tired Polly was becoming. She was sorry that they were not going on to St. Albans until supper time, for by tea-time she had had enough of city churches and hot pavements.

In the train going down she drooped.

'It's that infernal heat, it has been so very hot and you have done too much,' said Harvey kindly.

At St. Albans they were met by Aunt Ellen in a wagonette. Aunt was amiable; she was always pleased to see guests, though it must be admitted that she thought a good deal less of people who were poor than of those with nice comfortable incomes. She could not think what on earth they had been doing poking round old churches, and really didn't believe that Harvey ever would write a book; it was all probably a lot of bosh. They both looked famished.

She drove home where the family were assembled round the large friendly table, waiting for their supper. It was a nice room, with a huge engraving of Derby Day on one side of it, and a view across the meadow to the front, and from the side window out into the milking yards. Although she still felt deadly tired Polly quite enjoyed it.

She felt ill. She hoped that her supper was going to stay where it had been put, but there was a funny feeling about

her that she didn't quite understand. Tiredness, she thought, and tried to dismiss it.

'It—it will be quite horrible if I'm going to be ill,' she said, when she and Harvey went up to the spare bedroom.

Harvey was a solicitous man and an expert nurse. He thought that if she got to sleep she would soon feel better. But she didn't get to sleep; she had such an awful pain that she couldn't. Eventually he realised that something was wrong, and he finally went to call her Aunt. Aunt came round in a flurry, and instantly knew what was happening. She had had six children of her own and recognized all the symptoms.

'It's the baby,' said Aunt, tucking up her sleeves.

She said that she could manage, and manage she did. At three in the morning a daughter arrived.

'It's a girl, dear, and it's dead,' said Aunt and she put it on a chair. Afterwards Polly admitted that she was quite sure that she saw it move, but she felt so ashamed to be having a baby in somebody else's house that she didn't dare to say a word. Later on, of course, the child was dead.

I don't think it was a supreme blow. The body was decently buried, and that was that. The parents were aghast at having this happen on a visit, and they decided the least said the soonest mended. Probably lying there talking about it, Polly realized that a baby would have stretched their non-elastic income to breaking-point. It might have been very difficult.

As soon as ever they could—and most certainly before they should have done—Polly made the effort to get up and about. She felt awful! But, as she told herself, having a baby was an entirely natural thing, one mustn't make a fuss.

Her Uncle and Aunt were extremely kind but it didn't take away from the fact that this had happened and had been very awkward. Ten days later Polly, feeling that she had disgraced herself in a big way, took the journey up to

London, crossed to Liverpool Street, going down to Harwich.

Having a baby might be natural but she was finding it a bit upsetting. It now seemed to be an eternity since they had eaten their sandwiches in St. Bartholomew the Great.

* * *

At Harwich things were not going quite as well as they had done previously. Polly was ill. She found that her strength seemed to have gone and she could not take on her old life in the way she had done before. Harvey still mustered his church workers after butterflies, and pressed flowers, and fungi and old churches, and the rector still registered the extreme disapproval.

There was a confliction of opinion in the parish about Harvey Bloom. Some thought that he was brilliant; others thought that he was cracked. That is the penalty that men pay for the flash of genius predominant in them. People never admire those born to be a success, especially in their early days of tribulation.

There was still the utmost need for retrenchment when Missy wrote acquainting them with the fact that she was coming to stay. Polly still had a longing for her sister; Harvey never fostered any such longing.

Now, thought Polly, I'll spruce up the place and show her what I can do.

Missy came straight from Muriel's lavish household where apparently retrenchment was unknown, for the stock-broker was very rich. The moment that she arrived she started on her usual plan of campaign. She prided herself on the delicately barbed touch, and she had a genius for it.

At Christmas Polly had sent her doyleys (all that she could afford) and Missy's first remark at tea was, 'Why do you use doyleys? I always think they only serve to spoil a good plate.'

Polly had gone a splash on the supper, and prayed it

would go well. When the pudding arrived, Missy took one glance at it. She said, 'We always have such *good* puddings at Muriel's! I never think a pudding worth eating unless it is really good, do you?'

Naturally these remarks galled Harvey who knew how much energy had gone into getting the place ready for the unworthy guest. Conversation became strained. About nine o'clock, Missy said, 'Do you mind if I go to bed? There isn't anything to stay up for, is there?' and finally, 'Is it always as dull as this?' which made Harvey positively froth.

He loathed her.

It was a foregone conclusion that they would be at logger-heads before many hours had gone by and at the end of two days a real sporting row blew up. Missy had made Polly cry. She emphasized the glory that was Muriel's as against the poverty that was Polly's. Harvey was so angry that he said he wasn't going to have his wife upset by all these nasty innuendoes. Missy assumed that maddening look of outraged innocence, and said she could never understand why he was so unkind to her. She had said nothing. She thought Polly would be interested in Muriel's life. She ought to be as it was her sister's life also. She managed to put Harvey entirely in the wrong, and rejoiced in doing it. In the end she burst into tears and said that she would go back to Muriel.

'You can go to Hell as far as I'm concerned,' said Harvey losing his temper.

Oh, what a thing for a clergyman to say! Missy immediately had hysterics, and Polly had to patter up and down-stairs seeing after her and keeping it from the maid. It would never do for the maid to smell a rat; in those times one went to tremendous trouble to keep things from the maid who was always supposed to believe that the drawing-room ran on an even keel, nobody ever losing their tempers and saying rude things, or behaving at all oddly. Perhaps it is more truthful to say that is what the drawing-room **THOUGHT** the maid thought of them.

Missy, *in extremis*, drank all the brandy they had in the house before she would stop crying, and next day she packed her things and said that nothing on this earth would make her stay in a house where she wasn't wanted, but would go back to intelligent people who appreciated her virtues and liked her being with them. Harvey escorted her to the station carrying the Japanese basket in which her luggage was packed and they walked with a complete pavement between them.

When he got back to the house in West Street, he said, 'Now that's the end of it. Next time that awful woman comes, I go. And, if you dare ask that Mamma of yours or that something-or-other Johnny, I'll go for good!'

However, they were not asked down. Grandmamma had left Hertford, she had never really liked it, too many snobs lived there, said she, though one would have thought she would have been in her element with them. She had now gone off to live in Clapham, where she had a house or two. It was becoming apparent that she intended to live in every house that she owned, one by one. And as fast as she moved in she always took a dislike to the place; she liked living in her own houses, where she could throw out extra windows or put in new doors without having to consult anyone.

Unfortunately her married life was on the brink of a collapse. She and Mr. Brown had arrived at the permanent cat and dog stage. No longer did she hang on his arm like a reticule, and look much like it. No longer did she think of him as Prince Albert, but they actually fought openly.

One evening there was a most unladylike scene, one which she made no attempt to conceal. Mr. Brown had stayed out indecently late, without leave and without a muffler. Coming in at six through a November fog to high tea, Grandmamma greeted him with a volley which she had saved up for him. She let fly good and hearty and the surprising thing happened, for after all this time, the worm turned. Mr. Brown went upstairs and packed his things. He

left both her and the high tea never saying one word, or writing to her to tell her where he was for two solid years.

'I never thought he'd got it in him,' said Harvey, when he heard about it.

Why Mr. Brown ever returned to Grandmamma, I cannot imagine. If he was able to keep himself for a couple of years, surely he could have done it for longer? Or did he arrive at the conclusion that Hell with a competency is better than trying to work?

After she was 'deserted'—Grandmamma always alluded to it as the basest desertion—she cooled down slightly. It was the first time she had ever had to live in a house with no gentleman in it. She might be burgled. It was dangerous and quite wrong, and she felt that deeply. She wrote to the two daughters telling them how disgraceful it all was, and although Missy was unresponsive, Polly felt sorry for her mother.

'Oh come, you're a big girl now!' said Harvey.

'I know, but——'

Then the rector sent for Harvey.

He explained that he had been thinking things over, and had decided that a change would be a good thing. He did not find his curate congenial. Harvey was furious—angry. He had worked hard for Harwich, and was now established. He did not want to go. But one thing was clear, he and his rector would never have got on together, and perhaps it was just as well that the thing had boiled up to a head at last.

He went home to break the news to Polly.

CHAPTER TEN

THERE SEEMED TO BE LITTLE CHOICE ABOUT WHERE TO GO, for the only curacy that offered itself was in Hemsworth near Wakefield. The North of England was a sealed book to both of them. They believed that Yorkshire was a wonderful county, and that they would be very happy there; they knew little of what to expect from it.

I imagine that as they approached this town of grey slate roofs, of coal dust and grime with its general air of despondency their hearts must have sunk. Wakefield Prison brooded over the adjoining town. Swaffham had been dull enough, but there had been fertile and pleasant outlying country, and at least they had known everybody.

Hertford had been picturesque, and Harwich had had the sea, and the Essex marshes. Hemsworth had very little to offer.

The house they had taken was larger than the one in West Street, squarish and built like a box, but dark. It was ivy-clad, and even the points of the ivy leaves had coal-grimed rims to them. They had also made the mistake that so many southerners make, in believing that the northerner is so friendly and so easy to get on with. That is not always so. In fact it is very difficult for a southerner to get on with a man from Yorkshire or Lancashire. There is a certain barrier about them. The Scot is a different type; he knows few barriers and is a friendlier soul, but the northerner is reserved; he is canny and suspicious that strangers may 'get at him'. In many cases he is actually dour.

Polly and Harvey found their warmth chilled.

'We've got to stick it out,' said Harvey the first night when

they sat on either side of the hearth in their dour new home, not liking it so much.

There had been too frequent leaving of curacies already, and if it went on, it would be a black mark against him when it came to preferment. Polly wanted him to get on, she hoped to see him a dean.

'Dean' be damned!' said Harvey freely, he always said what he thought, 'I'm only a curate at the moment, let's get me a priest first.'

Missy wrote one of her intending-to-annoy letters, asking why in the world had they chosen Hemsworth, which she was sure was hateful, and why was it that Harvey could never settle anywhere? Was it good for his future to be always chopping and changing? What was the reason?

This caused a rumpus in the new home.

I sound prejudiced against my aunt, but once, years later, I discussed her with a very charming clergyman who knew her, and he said, 'She has the misfortune to be one of the most unlikeable people I know.' Had he said THE most unlikeable, how right he would have been!

Her letter arrived just when the family were distressed and disappointed with Hemsworth. But they had to get down to it. This time they had got to stay put

Harvey devoted himself to the Young Men's Christian, for this had been neglected. He worked hard, which entailed leaving Polly for long evenings alone, when she crocheted or tatted. The rector was a fat little man, who sat back behind an enormous stomach and was only too glad to let his curate do all the work for him. He was married to an aesthetically minded woman of Spanish extraction, who had a roving eye and before very long cast it hopefully in Harvey's direction. Most women did this.

'Now we shall be leaving soon,' prophesied Polly, who had learnt the procedure.

'No, I'm going to be careful.'

'If you accept her overtures, you'll be dismissed. If you

ignore them, you'll be scorned. And Hell holds no fury,' she reminded him. 'You'll have to prance along on a tight rope between the two.'

'Well, I won't,' said he, because he didn't like her.

However, ultimately, just to keep the curacy, he had to poise all seventeen stone of him on this frail border line, and play up to the lady of Spanish extraction, taking good care to stop short of anything dangerous. It was a case of living on thorns, and sooner or later they were sure that the thorns would penetrate some vital part, and then that would be IT!

* * *

But they had got to go carefully.

Missy had been unfortunately quite right when she said it was a mistake, all this chopping and changing, though they hardly wanted Missy to remind them of it.

Polly spent most of her time doing needlework. Her trousseau stood up gallantly to the demands made upon it, and she worked hard on the sewing machine which Grand-mamma had contributed for my elder sister's layette. This noble sewing machine—unfortunately of German extraction—lived with us for twenty-five years, made her layette, my father's underwear and flannel trousers. It was used by my brother for making sails for his boats; by me—a most heavy-handed little brute—for dolls' clothes. Once I got my hair completely wound up in the wheel, so that I thought I should have to be cut short like a boy, which I could not have borne; it made heavy altar curtains and even mended carpets, though with desperate—and we thought unreasonable—complaints.

It was known in the family as 'Emily', not to be confused with the maid, and was our constant friend and companion.

But Polly found Hemsworth deadly dull. The walks they went here were merely constitutional. Everywhere was smoky and grimy, for the coal dust seemed to penetrate into everything. Even the flowers looked different because of

It was a long step from the Rhine with its fast-flowing river to this little mining community and at times she fretted. If only the baby had lived it might have been better; she would have been a big girl by now. She hungered after the music which she had loved so much in Germany, and missed it. The parochial concerts that Harvey got up galled her. It was the era of the truly dreadful concert, and evenings when you 'brought along your music'. She rebelled against accompanying him whilst he and some village belle sang 'Tell-me-pretty-maiden', or he sailed along with that revolting song 'The Yeoman's wedding'. He made the most of the ding-dong part. Or at Christmas, when he wore a monk's habit, (made on Emily) and sang,

A Jovial Monk am I
Contented with my lot . . .

That horrified her.

'And anyway you can't possibly sing it in that moustache!' said she.

'I'll pull the cowl low and we can dim the footlights. It'll give a cloistered effect,' he suggested.

'Yes, but . . .'

'Now don't start throwing cold water. . . .'

Suddenly she felt enclosed. Alarmed for the future. It seemed to be so little! She disliked the penny reading (a pet recreation just then), spelling-bees amused her, save that she could spell and Harvey couldn't. Occasionally she shivered for him; it looked so awful when the curate made outrageous mistakes.

'Nonsense, nobody'll know,' said he.

'But I know,' she told him.

* * *

It was at the beginning of her second dreary year in Hemsworth that Harvey started his first book *Heraldry of the South-West Riding*. It was on his wife's suggestion.

Just about that time she received a letter from Mary Leigh bearing an invitation.

'I'm going to Wiesbaden for three weeks about my eyes which are troubling me again. Wondered if you'd care to come too?'

At first Polly would have refused, but it was Harvey who insisted on her accepting. The next complication that presented itself was the suggestion of the rector's wife, that they should shut up their home whilst Polly was absent, and Harvey should come to lodge at the rectory and so give the maid a holiday. It would have been no sort of holiday for Harvey.

Nothing more horrifying could have occurred, and it took him three days to get out of that with discretion. He had to walk into Wakefield, not daring to trust the local post office where anything might be read and reported on to the rectory, and he sent a telegram to his Aunt Mary to come up from Castleacre and keep house for him in Polly's absence.

A suitable note was then dispatched to the rectory referring to the fact that he had already promised his favourite aunt that she should spend this time with him, and she had longed to see Yorkshire (an absolute lie, because Aunt Mary loathed it and thought it horrible), so that he did not see how he could very well disappoint her.

Great-Aunt Mary arrived at Hemsworth. She was a charming woman, and she took an immediate dislike to the rector's wife possibly because her pomeranian dog tried to bite her, and if my great-aunt hadn't been wearing elastic-sided boots—Jemima's—the dog would have succeeded.

'And what is your dog's name?' she asked, trying to be polite about the unfortunate accident.

'*Bijou*,' said the rector's wife, and added patronizingly, 'that's French for jewel.'

'So I imagine,' snapped back Aunt Mary, who it seemed could bite also.

The night Polly and Mary Leigh stood on the deck of the

Harwich-and-the-Hook steamer, they looked out at the lights of Harwich twinkling to the right, and Shotley a long glimmer on the left. It seemed to be like a great adventure, and for Polly Gardner life held very few adventures. Already she was disappointed in the limitations of her marriage. She loved Harvey, but felt that he was being wasted in stupid curacies. He alarmed her a little by the impetuosity with which he made violent friends and equally violent enemies. He was flirtatious in some ways, a failing always liable to misconstruction, and although he thought it merely amusing, Polly considered it to be dangerous.

The two of them took the train to Cologne, and it seemed that they were girls again as they retraced the old steps. Here was the Rhine flowing along, the Hohenzollern Bridge, and the hills with the fir forests and the cherry beyond. Eventually they came to Wiesbaden in the middle of the comfortable afternoon and sat under the lindens taking their tea on to the street, whilst a string band tinkled delightful music. It was charming, and like old times.

Polly found it extremely pleasant not to be so gruellingly short of money even for the briefest space of time. Their tiny income left no margin, and she had to think before she ventured an additional half-penny. On this trip Mary Leigh paid all the expenses, there was nothing to worry about.

And the greatest joy of all was that Mary's eyes responded to the treatment; as she got better they went long walks together, and along the Rhine in a steamer, with flags flying, and a band playing the *Lorelei* as they came in sight of the *Schönste Jungfrau*. All the withered spinsters rushed to that side of the boat with a sigh of ecstasy at beholding the siren.

'One of these days the boat'll capsize,' said Polly, 'it would make me laugh!'

They went on to Maintz, to concerts and operas. Now in the bright yellow sunshine of Germany, it seemed that Hemsworth with the cage going down into the pits, and the women with the shawls tied over their heads, the coal grit

and the grime, were no longer existent. It was almost forgotten.

When they returned Polly brought with her a box of the live crimson slugs she had caught in the woods, and insisted on keeping them in the cucumber frame in the garden. She thought they would amuse Harvey. All the same she hated returning.

* * *

In Hemsworth nothing happened.

On Monday mornings the thriftless families trooped past the curate's house to pawn their Sunday clothes until the next week-end, when pay day would redeem them for the new Sunday. They lived for their greyhounds. Harvey sometimes said that if the children died it didn't seem to matter, but if their dogs died, then they held a wake, and wept pints.

He sat up all night with a sick child and caught diphtheria from it. He was agitated as to the mode of life up there, the casual hold on life, the neglect of the children, the crowded housing conditions, and the general outlook of the miners. But every day was just like its predecessor.

They visited people who did not want to be visited, and there was so little that it was possible to do for them. They got up entertainments, they paid calls, there were tea-parties and Dorcas meetings. All the time they were riding on that tight rope between the rector's wife and Harvey. However, Harvey was getting wiser. He managed extremely well, and never went over the edge one side or the other. It was a triumph.

One day Polly said, 'I suppose it's the spring but I'm feeling terribly run down. I believe I'm starting that wretched anaemia again.'

The local doctor was a friend of theirs, a kind painstaking man of the family doctor type, and I am sure very poor himself. It is never the good doctors who are well paid. He came in to have a look at Polly, who had thrown a couple

of faints, and gave the verdict that neither of them had so much as thought of.

I had begun.

The lilacs were coming out, as yet ungrimed; the little garden was sweet with May. In the following January, said the kind doctor, I would be.

'It's got to be another girl,' said Polly.

'Why do you want a girl?' asked Harvey.

She answered in one of her psychic moods. Polly had strange ways of seeing ahead. 'Boys are no good to my family, they never have been. I want a girl, and I hope that when the time comes, she has only girls.'

When they got used to the idea they were rather pleased about it. They had been married for some years now, and after the arrival of the first baby in a hurry at St. Albans, there had been no sign of a second one appearing. They had come to the conclusion that there wouldn't be another one. But on one point they both were simultaneously resolved.

Nothing would induce Harvey to allow a child of his to be born in Yorkshire, he hated the place so much. Now they had been here over three years so that they could afford to leave. As far as Polly was concerned it had never been living at all, but the merest form of dim existence.

'We'll look out for something in the south,' said he.

'Yes, let's! We've got all the summer to decide upon it,' said she.

Immediately she engaged a nurse, who would come to her wherever she was when I arrived. That was typical. Why in the world engage the local signalman's wife to come in January, when Polly might be anywhere in Surrey or Sussex, and it was a whole day's journey to get there? The woman was of course quite untrained, but a homely body and cheap. And, having got themselves involved with the signalman's wife, they took a curacy in Chelmsford.

Springfield is a suburb of Chelmsford, very charming, and it was a town in the southern district which could give them

just what they wanted. There was the clear sharp Essex air and here were people who thought as they did, and it would be possible to make friends. They wanted so much to get back to the East side of England, and away from the North. Springfield looked like Heaven to them both, and they came to it at midsummer.

Polly always felt that her time spent at Hemsworth might just as well have been inside Wakefield gaol. She said good-bye to it without one regret.

'What a place!' said she as she left it.

They came in the bright sunshine to Springfield, looking inviting in spite of the immense shadow the prison cast over their very home. But after Hemsworth anything would have been beautiful. They could hardly believe that the horror of living in the North was over and done with.

They settled in.

Unfortunately the clothes made for my sister had been dispatched to poor families, and the sewing began all over again. 'Emily' got busy. I required a lot of stuff. Six day-flannels, six night ones. Six day-gowns, six nightdresses. Six best muslin petticoats made with very long tails, six indifferent muslin petticoats. Three grand robes for parochial occasions (I started young!), three large shawls, three head flannels. Everything had to be embroidered with floss silk and made very smartly. Cot blankets were sprinkled with daisies. Names came into consideration.

Harvey had slightly romantic ideas; he thought Rose or May would be sweet combined with the surname. Polly steered him away from such a thought. Frances was the Bloom name, or Mary. Neither liked it. Dagmar came under consideration as a thought, Valerie was another idea. It was accepted that my second name would be by my father's christian name Harvey, but for the moment there was a lot of cogitation and debate about the first one. 'Emily' was working overtime.

The rectory family were all charming and young, and for

the first time Polly seemed to be with people who were entirely after her own heart. The Reverend Cyril Pearson was the father of the famous Sir Arthur, who at that time was beginning a steady journalistic career and creeping up the hard road to fame.

Polly thought that that summer was one of the happiest she had ever spent. She had escaped purgatory. A rosy future lay ahead of her, and she had a baby coming which had simply GOT to be a girl!

Little gifts arrived for her and her baby. Life was good. And, just about this time, the first of her spiritualistic convictions came to her, and she started exploring a new world and being intensely interested in the other side. Harvey was interested too, but, as he said, he wasn't at all sure whether his interest wouldn't get him into serious trouble with the powers-that-be; so he kept quiet about it.

* * *

Once Christmas was over and done with they would finally settle down for my arrival about January the tenth. Mrs. Jaycock the signalman's wife would appear from the other end of England on the fifth, which was a good arrangement and everything was going really well. Or so they thought.

But I have always been a very determined person, and I got there first.

December the eleventh was a Sunday. It had followed the usual order of all such Sundays, with breakfast after early service, and as little work done in the house as possible in case the puritan congregation thought that the curate was breaking any of the commandments. To Matins went Polly and her husband—I also—returning to that rigorous cold lunch which was all in accordance with the non-breaking of the Lord's Day, and so to be encouraged.

There was never any time on the day of rest for the clergyman to rest. That did not come into the scheme of things. Lunch could not be lingered over; Sunday school followed

it, and immediately that was done, there was afternoon service. So off we all went again at it, good and hearty.

Polly played the harmonium for the afternoon service (I assisting) and towards the end of it she realized that she really did feel rather peculiar. 'Hark, a thrilling voice is sounding', seemed to be only too true, for she had the most frightful twiddle in her tummy.

That's funny, she thought!

She walked home not saying very much, for she was a brave woman, and when she got there she did not fancy tea, which was the good old Rectory Sunday tea with stamina for Harvey, who had yet another service before him. She went up to bed, feeling rather sick. Her lunch must have disagreed with her, she thought, and of course she had once thought much the same thing about a certain supper at St. Albans. The signalman's wife missed the boat for I caught the earlier one.

By six o'clock that evening a local gamp had come in to be with Polly, and was busily assuring her that it really wouldn't be very long, in fact she suspected it would be all over before Dr. Pitt got there. Earlier the same assurance had been given to Grandmamma, who I am sure bore her ordeal with commendable fortitude, but took it out of somebody else later on.

'It's a girl,' said Grandmamma's gamp.

* * *

In the snowiness of that winter's evening, so close to Christmas that the first carollers were in the street below, a gamp received six pounds of U.B. into a flannel wrapper, and hushed my yowlings.

'It's all over,' she said to Polly, 'and it's a girl!'

'I wanted a girl,' said No Lady's Mum!

